

DATE ISSUED: March 20, 2003

REPORT NO. 03-053

ATTENTION: Honorable Mayor and City Council
Docket of March 24, 2003

SUBJECT: Graffiti Strike Force

REFERENCE: N/A

SUMMARY

THIS IS AN INFORMATION ITEM ONLY. NO ACTION IS REQUIRED ON THE PART OF THE CITY COUNCIL.

BACKGROUND

Mayor Dick Murphy announced a citywide Graffiti Strike Force (“GSF”) to combat graffiti crimes in his State of the City address on January 6, 2003. The Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee discussed the Mayor’s proposal on January 15, 2003, and directed the City Manager to report back to the Committee on implementation. The Police Department briefed the Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee on its plans to implement the GSF on February 19, 2003. This report summarizes the Department’s implementation efforts to date.

DISCUSSION

The Police Department is in the process of forming a GSF to combat graffiti crimes citywide. The GSF will consist of eight experienced and highly motivated patrol officers, selected from various units and divisions within the Department, and one sergeant. The team will focus on graffiti hotspots citywide. Team members also will have assigned areas of responsibility to ensure a consistent and coordinated response to graffiti crimes. Additionally, two Southeastern Division officers will work closely with the GSF to focus on graffiti crimes in their command. Using digital technology, GSF officers will aggressively and proactively document graffiti crimes with the goal of linking graffiti to suspects, building strong crime cases, and apprehending and convicting graffiti vandals. The team is scheduled to begin operation April 1, 2003.

The GSF will be modeled after a successful team that has operated at the Department's Western Division since September 1999. That team formed in response to complaints from residents about graffiti at their homes, businesses, and neighborhoods. The team found that most graffiti crimes were not documented or investigated, resulting in no accountability to victims for graffiti damage. Graffiti crimes generally are too tough to investigate and prosecute because it is rare to witness graffiti vandals or "taggers" in the act and difficult to develop leads from graffiti or "tags." Also, many victims do not report graffiti crimes before painting out evidence of the crime.

Like the Western Division team, GSF officers will attack graffiti on several fronts. Through fliers and community forums, they will teach the community to prevent graffiti and assist police with information on graffiti crimes. They will obtain authorization letters so that officers taking reports on graffiti crimes will have access to information necessary to prepare crime reports without disturbing graffiti victims after hours. They will use digital cameras, computers, and a photo printer obtained from grants and donations to document and link graffiti crimes. They will use digital cameras instead of expensive, unreliable Polaroid film to document graffiti because digital cameras make taking, storing, and reproducing photos simple and inexpensive. They will continue to work closely within the Department, specifically patrol divisions, the Jurisdictions United For Drug Gang Enforcement (JUDGE) Unit, and the Gang Unit, to ensure a consistent and coordinated response. They will continue to work in close partnership with the City's Graffiti Control Program, City Attorney's Graffiti Prosecution Unit, Adult and Juvenile Probation, and the District Attorney's Office to maximize crime prevention, vigorous prosecution, and enforcement of probation conditions.

Based on the success of Western Division's graffiti team, the Department expects to realize the following benefits from the GSF:

☞ Increased organizational understanding: The GSF will continue to train patrol officers in the Department and neighboring agencies on graffiti prevention and intervention. The GSF will continue to train prosecutors regarding graffiti crimes and trends to enhance their ability to prosecute graffiti crimes and structure appropriate dispositions.

☞ Increased productivity: The GSF will handle all graffiti related investigations citywide. GSF officers will respond when requested by patrol officers who have suspects detained or in custody for graffiti related crimes. The GSF officers will conduct the investigation.

☞ Improved documentation and evidence collection: The GSF will use digital cameras, computers, and photo quality printers for archiving digital images. Graffiti images will be stored in compliance with the District Attorney's guidelines for digital evidence.

☞ Improved tracking: The GSF will track "tagging" crews and suspects throughout San Diego.

☞ Improved accountability: Graffiti crimes cost the City of San Diego an estimated \$1.5 million annually for code enforcement and cleanup. That figure does not include losses from victims such as CalTrans, San Diego City Schools, private businesses, and residents. The GSF will build strong crime cases, the first step in holding graffiti vandals accountable for damage to victims. A

close partnership with prosecutors will result in restitution for victims, so that they may recover their losses. GSF officers will work with the Probation Department to ensure payment of restitution and compliance with other terms of probation.

The Department will measure the effectiveness of the GSF in the following ways:

☞ Feedback from Neighborhood Code Compliance’s Graffiti Control Program Manager (GCPM): The GSF sergeant will request documentation from the GCPM on the number of graffiti cleanup callouts. Together they will pinpoint areas that have more graffiti callouts and will determine whether the GSF’s operations were responsible for improvements. The GCPM will conduct annual graffiti surveys for comparison to previous years.

☞ GSF statistics: The GSF sergeant will log the team’s statistics. The sergeant will consistently evaluate all data and make changes as needed in order to maintain the team’s effectiveness. Each December, the GSF sergeant will prepare an annual report on the team’s statistics and measured effectiveness through investigations, property damage, arrests, convictions, and restitution paid.

☞ The GSF will monitor businesses not in compliance with current graffiti laws: The GSF will work with Juvenile Service Team officers to set up minor decoy and “buy-bust” operations to monitor businesses suspected of selling aerosol paint to minors. Much like details targeting the sale of alcohol to minors, decoys will be sent into businesses to try and purchase aerosol paint products. Businesses in violation will be cited and monitored for compliance.

Respectfully submitted,

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Police Department

Approved: George I. Loveland
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