



Strategies for Improved Officer Safety

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For several years the Burlington (NC) Police Department has used a philosophy of continuous improvement to help make purchasing decisions, modify policy and enhance training, all with the focus on improving officer safety outcomes. A number of the changes relate directly to traffic safety outcomes and this list highlights many of the improvements.

View this document online at:

<http://www.burlingtonnc.gov/1879/National-and-State-Recognitions>

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Officer Safety- Equipment

Transition to IIIA Body Armor:

Cost: \$75 per vest

Our previous policy authorized reimbursement for Level IIA vests. This was changed and we now allow the purchase (at agency cost) of IIA, II, and IIIA vests. Any carriers that show wear are immediately replaced at no cost to the officer.

Rifle Rated Ceramic Body Armor for All First Responders:

Cost: \$500 per officer

With the increasing frequency of active shooter situations across America, we purchased front and back ceramic plates in tactical carriers that are rated to withstand rifle fire in excess of level IIIA protection for every first responder. The equipment is to be carried.

Ballistic Helmets for All First Responders:

Cost: \$352 per officer

Again, based on the violence level in society, we took the step to custom fit and order ballistic helmets for every first responder. This equipment is kept in the assigned vehicle and is immediately available for deployment when necessary on the front seat of the vehicle and immediately accessible for deployment in any situation.

Handgun Mounted Flashlights for All Officers:

Cost: \$99 per officer

Knowing the ratio in which officers are involved in deadly force encounters in low light conditions, we purchased weapon mounted lights and new holsters for every single officer.

Vehicle Mounted Flashlights for All Officers:

We purchased new flashlights for every officer mounted in their assigned vehicle.

Patrol Rifle Program- Additional Department Weapons:

The number of weapons issued by the agency was increased from 24 to 45. Including SRT operators deployed in patrol we have approximately above a 50 percent deployment ratio.

Portable Ballistic Shields:

Cost: \$995 per shield

We purchased and deployed 10 portable ballistic shields. These shields roll in a compact fashion to allow for easy transportation and quick deployment. With five on day shift and five on night shift nearly half of the available officers are properly equipped with this added level of protection. We have now increased the number to 25 shields, nearly a 50% deployment in patrol.

Rip Hobble Restraint Devices:

Cost: \$17 each

We purchased and issued Rip Hobble Restraint devices to every officer. They were properly trained on their deployment in order to reduce officer injury and potential escape from suspects with a certain level of violence or who have priors for escape.

Spit Hoods for Suspects:

Cost: \$32.99 per Box of 5

Purchased to reduce the contamination and fluid borne diseases from suspects inclined to spit on officers. These are single use disposable items.

Tactical Medical Kits in All Cars:

Cost: \$250 per officer

Tactical medical kits including a tourniquet, battle dressing, and other supplies are issued to each officer and are small enough for these lifesaving tools to be carried in their cargo pocket or kept on the front seat of their assigned patrol car.

Updated, Less Lethal Options:

Cost: \$6,662 total

All officers now have an assigned Taser as well as the availability of larger canisters of OC spray and less lethal shotguns.

Push Bumpers for Vehicles:

Cost: 660 per car

Beginning with the 2014 vehicles, we installed front push bumpers on all newly purchased vehicles. This equipment will reduce injuries from low-speed collisions and deer strikes and also reduce the risk of injuries when moving disabled vehicles from the roadway.

Automated External Defibrillator (AED):

Cost: \$1250 per car

Installed an AED in every new car purchased.

Magnetic Mic Holder:

Cost: \$25 per car

Eliminated the clip mic holder and replaced it with a magnetic one. This allows the user to keep their eyes on the road more.

Ghost Decals:

Cost: \$35 per car

These decals are mostly visible at night and reflect brightly on the rear and corners of the vehicle.

Clear Transport Cages:

Cost: \$978 per car

Improves in-car visibility while driving.

Ballistic Panels in Driver Door:

Cost: \$1,660 per car

Beginning with the 2013 vehicles, ballistic panels installed in the driver side door panel.

Increased Lighting & Markings on Patrol Vehicles:

Vehicles that were purchased in 2011 had not been outfitted with overhead emergency lighting as a cost saving measure. Additional lighting and appropriate reflective striping was added to make these vehicles safer.

High Visibility Traffic Vests, Wands, and reflective Gloves:

Officers were issued new ANSI 207-2006 compliant tear-away and highly reflective vests.

GeoTab Vehicle Location System:

Cost: \$392 per car

To control for seatbelt usage, speed reduction, and overall safe driving.

Metal Radar Mounting Hardware:

\$45 per car

In a collision, any object can become airborne and injure an officer. Metal mounts are safer in the passenger compartment than previously used Velcro.

Minimum Staffing in Patrol:

Prior to 2014, we had established squad sizes based on allocated staffing. Due to training, vacation and sick calls, any given squad might be reduced to a small handful of officers with no attention paid to the negative impact on officer safety. Upon creating a mandatory minimum of 10 officers, additional officers are called in on overtime to ensure adequate staffing and increase officer safety.

Mandatory Body Armor Policy:

Prior to 2014 we had a mandatory ballistic vest program, but there were a number of loopholes and exceptions. In an effort to ensure our ballistic vest program was a leader in the nation, we eliminated heat exceptions and doctor's notes/excuses. Similar to a firearms qualification, if you cannot wear your body armor, then you cannot work your shift.

Leadership Wears Body Armor:

The previous policy allowed officers on "administrative duties, but in uniform to not wear body armor. All employees in uniform now wear body armor regardless of assignment.

Patrol Rifle Program- Personally Owned Rifles Allowed:

Officers were previously barred from carrying a personally owned rifle. This policy was changed and we began a training program and authorized the carry of a wide range of departmentally approved long guns. We currently have approximately 15 personally owned rifles carried by patrol officers.

Encourage Back-up Weapon Qualifications:

While the department had technically approved back-up weapons, there was a complicated and unnecessary approval process and the practice was unofficially discouraged. A new emphasis was placed on this tactic/equipment and the hurdles were removed. We now have more than ten percent of our officers who are approved to carry back-up weapons.

Mandatory "Cover Officer" on Traffic Stops:

Based on the national trend of assaulting officers, we implemented a policy of assigning a mandatory cover officer on every traffic stop.

Range Policy Updates:

All officers sear their body armor at the range with a trauma kit on their vests.

Modified Pursuit Policy:

We eliminated the option to pursue DWI violators and now all pursuits must be for violent fleeing felons. This has reduced the number of pursuits each year by about 50%.

Enhance Traffic Crash Review Process:

Two years ago we modified the review process for collisions to increase accountability. We now mandate a visit with the entire executive staff to explain the causal factors after a crash. Those found to have preventable crashes are required to attend remedial training.

Mandatory Seatbelt Policy:

We modified the seatbelt policy to become more practical and believe full enforcement of the policy has resulted in a high rate of voluntary compliance.

3

Officer Training

Tactical Medical Training- Includes Self-Aid & Buddy-Aid:

Cost: \$10,419

All personnel are provided a four hour training class, each officer is capable of “self-aid” or “buddy aid” in order to help increase officer survivability after critical injuries in the line of duty.

Turning Target System at the Range:

Cost: \$68,000

Turning targets were added to the main range. This addition has allowed us to add a more consistent element of time pressure to our training environment. Our experience shows officers are improving their draw time and are more quickly putting rounds on target as they transition from “shooting paper” to learning to “gun fight.”

Simunition and Scenario Based Training:

Cost: \$5,000

We purchased simunition guns and all of the required safety equipment in order to conduct more effective “force on force” type training.

Training Exceeding the State Requirements:

NC law requires 24 hours of mandatory in service training and an additional 16 hours of training dictated by the agency. In addition to these 40 hours of training, we have required every officer to attend 8 hours of training on “The Warrior Mindset and Surviving Deadly Force Encounters.” This training uses video segments and real case studies to drive home the importance of training and mindset in surviving police work. We have also required every officer to attend training on the Below 100 program.

Below 100 Training:

Cost: \$0

NC standards of training recommend and provided in-house following the state outline.

Stop Stick Training:

Cost: \$0

Based on national data about officer injuries, we also required all of our officers to attend additional training on stop stick deployment. A policy modification drives home the safety issues and stop sticks must now be deployed from a position of cover and the officer cannot run into the roadway after deployment.

Mandatory Physical Fitness Testing:

Cost: \$0

Beginning in 2013, we began a lengthy process to implement a mandatory fitness policy. All new employees hired after January 1, 2014 immediately became responsible for passing the fitness test twice per year. Effective January 1, 2016 all tenured employees will have the same requirement.

Enhanced PD Gym & Fitness Equipment:

Cost: \$100,000 total (\$40,000 to bring building to code)

In order to increase the buy-in from employees and increase the likelihood of success, we renovated a city warehouse into a gym facility. We have invested over \$100,000 thus far on this project. The Belmont Training Facility (BTF) is available to all first responders in the county and is open 24/7 free of charge. We have 700 square feet of padded mat for arrest tactics training, 620 square feet of space for CrossFit training, 416 square feet of free weights, 965 square feet of weight machines and cardio equipment, Full showers including clean bath towels and hand towel service, An additional 4000 square feet dedicated to the annual fitness testing apparatus, AND An on-site training officer/fitness coach trained in Cooper and other specialties and available instructors for CrossFit and yoga, plus Pilates and fitness tapes!

Mandatory Annual Physical Examination:

Cost: \$0

Each employee is required to have an annual physical as part of the City-wide wellness program and health benefit.

Free Occupational Health Clinic:

Cost: \$0

All city employees have access to the Occupational Health Clinic which is staffed by two nurses and a doctor and operates M-F, 8-5 at no cost to employees and adult family. Wide ranging services are available for free.

New Peer Support/CISD Team:

Cost: \$2,000 per training

The department created a Peer Support Team and properly trained them to care for their peers. We have 19 members and a strong policy to guide this program. Continual training reminds supervisors to activate the team for “defusing” after medium size events and full Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD) after major events. Attendance is mandatory for all officers involved in a shooting incident or other critical incident.

Enhanced Employee Assistance Program (EAP):

Cost: \$0

We worked with the City to engage an EAP provider who was experienced in police related issues. We have seen an increase in the use of the program based on her high quality reputation.

City Wellness Council Programs:

Cost: \$0

The city sponsored Wellness Council offers smoking cessation programs, nutrition programs, massages and healthy living programs throughout the year and the department actively promotes participation in these programs.

Healthy Snacks at Training:

Cost: Average of \$60 per class (depends on number of participants)

Rather than having officers purchase soda and candy from the vending machine, we now provide fruit, granola bars and water at each seat for many training classes.

Nutritional Classes:

Cost: \$0

The department hosted a “train the trainer” program on “How to Eat on the Beat” and nutrition classes to help improve wellness. These classes discussed the unique nature of eating during shiftwork and taught officers to make smart choices at work.

On-duty Exercise Option for all Employees:

Officers are encouraged to work out in the BTF on duty or off, and have access to a full time training officer who maintains the facility and helps develop personal fitness programs for officers.

Fitness Reimbursement Options:

Cost: \$100 per year per officer

In addition to free use of the BTF, all officers are given a free YMCA membership and the city will additionally reimburse up to \$100 per year for a private gym membership of their choosing.

Hydration Supplies During High Heat Days:

Cost: \$15 per day during summer

During periods of excessively hot weather, the department provides free Gatorade and water to employees. Color coded charts have been installed in the restrooms in order to help employees self-evaluate the color of their urine to better hydrate.

Shooting Investigation Team:

Cost: \$0

An officer Involved Shooting Team was formed to investigate all officer involved shootings. The team is comprised of officers from within the department which provides a sense of stability and reduces stress in these types of incidents.

Chaplaincy Program:

Cost: minimal

Our program consists of six different pastors who offer weekly devotionals and messages of inspiration on Sundays in a rotational basis. They are on call and available 24/7 to consult with officers and allow officers access to support regardless of their personal faith or denomination.

Partners Off-duty Program:

Cost: \$0

This is a program that continues to evolve. The goal is to help spouses and family members of officers understand the unique issues which Law Enforcement officers face. Fiscal management classes are available as well as a new employee orientation session.

Departmental Committees:

Cost: \$0

The department has developed several employee committees, such as the vehicle committee, uniform committee and recruiting committee which are designed to increase officer involvement in creating policies and guiding the future of the department. Having input in this way increases the inclusive nature of our organization, builds morale, and increases job satisfaction over time.

Tuition Reimbursement Program:

Cost: Up to \$1500 per person per year

The department actively promotes higher education and advanced degrees are highly encouraged. We allow flexible schedules for officers to attend college classes and further their education. A tuition reimbursement program is available.