

MANDATED PEACE OFFICER TRAINING

“EXCELLENCE IS AN ART WON BY TRAINING AND HABITUATION.

WE ARE WHAT WE REPEATEDLY DO.”-ARISTOTLE

The 2012/2013 San Luis Obispo County Grand Jury was made aware of the potential liability to the County and local police agencies which could follow from a lack of ongoing peace officer training. The Grand Jury initiated an audit of the training in the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Department and the police departments of Arroyo Grande, Atascadero, Grover Beach, Morro Bay, Pismo Beach, San Luis Obispo and Paso Robles.

SUMMARY

A well-trained police force is responsible for enforcing the law in a professional manner, remaining current with changing laws and being sensitive to the expectations of the citizens of San Luis Obispo County. There is also a potential of liability to all jurisdictions if their personnel are not properly trained.

The Grand Jury recognized that consistent training, including refresher training on special topics, should serve to ensure citizens that officers are up to date on the law and that their professional skills and tools of their trade are current. One of the goals of the California Peace Officers Standards and Training Commission (POST) is to see that all officers have such training. The audit conducted by the Grand Jury concluded that all mandated training in the County is in compliance with POST requirements.

ORIGIN

Members of the 2012/2013 Grand Jury initiated this investigation in an effort to verify that all peace officer mandated training in the County was current. The Grand Jury was concerned that training might be delayed or sacrificed due to reduced budget and reduced resources. Further, delinquent training could affect public safety and worsen liability risks.

METHOD

The Grand Jury requested and received written policies and procedures regarding compliance with mandated training from all seven municipal police departments in the County and the Sheriff's Department. Additional inquiries were made by Grand Jury members during visits to local police agencies.

The Grand Jury reviewed written responses to their inquiries in order to verify that all required training was in compliance with POST mandates, content and within a specified timeframe. The Chiefs of Police and/or training supervisors of each agency and the Sheriff's Department provided responses.

The Grand Jury's audit focused on the recurring training areas of Communications Training and "perishable" skills. Perishable skills for peace officers have been identified as driving, tactical firearms, arrest and control, force options and verbal communication. Studies have shown that incidents involving these skills make up the majority of law enforcement and civilian deaths, injuries and resulting legal claims. The same studies show that after two years without refresher training those skills begin to deteriorate.¹ This training requires a minimum of 12 hours in each two-year period, with a minimum of 4 hours in each of the following three topical areas:

- Arrest and Control;
- Driver Training and Pursuit;
- Tactical Firearms.

NARRATIVE

In 1959 legislation creating the Commission on California Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) was passed by the California State Legislature and signed by Governor Pat Brown, establishing minimum standards for selection and training of California law enforcement officers. It has a staff of more than 130 and funding of \$62 million per year. An Executive

¹ <http://post.ca.gov/> "CA, Gov POST Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training"

Director appointed by the Commission oversees the agency. The POST website states that its Mission is, "... to continually enhance the professionalism of California law enforcement in serving communities."

All agencies in San Luis Obispo County, with the exception of Pismo Beach, adhere to the policies and procedures of POST. Pismo Beach is accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement (CALEA), a national accreditation program. However, Pismo Beach does follow POST guidelines through CALEA, which are similar in nature.²

POST funding comes from the Peace Officers Training Fund (POTF). POTF receives money from the State Penalty Assessment Fund, which in turn receives money from penalty assessments on criminal and traffic fines. Therefore, the people who violate the laws that peace officers are trained to enforce actually fund the POST Program.

All 616 participating agencies including those in San Luis Obispo County agree to abide by the standards established by POST. Officers undertake a basic course of training when they join the force. Currently basic training consists of 664 hours. Peace officers are required to complete continuing perishable skills training on a two-year cycle.

CONCLUSION

After completion of the audit, the 2012/2013 Grand Jury determined that law enforcement agencies in San Luis Obispo County are in compliance with POST requirements. The Grand Jury believes this compliance not only ensures the citizens of the County that their police personnel are properly trained, but that such training reduces the liability to cities and the County for inappropriate actions by law enforcement personnel.

COMMENDATION

² Information regarding POST and CALEA was extrapolated from a 2011/2012 Grand Jury report on evidence and property storage in police agencies.

The 2012/2013 Grand Jury commends law enforcement agencies in San Luis Obispo County for their continuing efforts to maintain high standards of training which include constant review and upgrading and refreshes perishable skills.

The members of the Grand Jury were impressed by the efforts of local law enforcement departments and the leadership provided by the Sheriff and the Chiefs of Police in San Luis Obispo County. This leadership ensures the residents of the County that their police personnel adhere to high professional standards.