

Community Policing Concepts Applied to TLE Patrol*

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There is much talk these days about community-oriented policing. Because the term has different meanings for different people, it is reasonable for a highway patrol officer to ask, "How does community policing apply to me?" The answer begins with a definition of the term. According to the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, "community policing is a policing philosophy that promotes and supports organizational strategies to address the causes and reduce the fear of crime and social disorder through problem-solving tactics and community-police partnerships." Perhaps the most important aspect of this definition is that community policing is a *philosophy* - an approach to policing or a way of doing business. It is not simply one or more programs that emphasize the community.

In an agency as large as the Texas Department of Public Safety with personnel spread out all across the state, it is difficult for individual HP officers to affect meaningful changes in overall organizational strategies at an administrative level. However, officers can do much on their own beats. Individual officers working specific areas can be community oriented in their approaches to the identification, prioritization, and solving of problems.

Like most peace officers, HP officers have considerable discretion in determining the kinds of officer-initiated field activities in which to become involved. Under a community oriented policing model, officers rely on input from the community in deciding what kinds of activities would be most beneficial to the local community. The local residents in one area may be concerned about speeding on a particular highway, whereas residents elsewhere may be concerned about an especially dangerous railroad crossing. The solicitation and consideration of input from residents in identifying problems and establishing policing priorities is an important part of community policing.

Once problems have been identified and prioritized, the problem solving part of community policing takes over. The dominant model for police problem solving is the S.A.R.A. model developed by Eck and Spelman over a decade ago. Model implementation involves four steps: Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment. Peace officers generally do fairly well at Scanning and Responding, but are somewhat less adept at Analysis and are generally not very good at Assessment (as those terms are defined by the model).

Scanning under the S.A.R.A. model involves a determination of what the problem is. If, for example, someone is complaining about a problem with speeding on a particular stretch of highway, scanning would require investigation into how much of a problem speeding is. An unmarked car with a hand-held radar unit might be used to determine average speeds on that roadway. Rates of speeding could be compared with those on other roadways to clarify the extent to which a problem exists. Data may have to be collected at different times of day or on different weekdays because of the possibility of variability as a function of time.

Once the officer has completed the problem scan, he or she moves to problem analysis. Analysis involves a more thoroughgoing investigation into the causes of the problem and other issues at stake. The scan of the speeding problem referred to above, for example, might reveal a coincidence between the violation's timing and the changing of shifts at a local plant. The analysis, thus, might focus on where most plant workers reside, routes that are available other than the one at issue in the speeding complaint and so forth.

The next step in the process is fashioning a response. Ideally, the response should be chosen based on the seriousness of the problem (Scanning) and the interests at stake (Analysis). Under a community policing approach, the response may well be non-traditional or, alternatively, may involve a mix between traditional and non-traditional policing. With our speeding problem, for instance, we may choose a selective enforcement strategy on that roadway. This traditional response, though, may be coupled with placement of an announcement of the enforcement strategy in the plant's employee newsletter - a non-traditional approach.

The final step **under the S.A.R.A. model** is assessment. **This is the** area where policing typically falls short. Assessment involves an evaluation of the effectiveness of the response. In the example with which we have been dealing, assessment of the response likely would involve a return to the first step. That is, the officer returns to the area in an unmarked vehicle with a hand-held radar unit and collects new data on rates of speeding. The new data can be compared with the old data to see whether any change has occurred. The officer also could return to the original complainant(s) to see whether there is a perception of improvement.

Community oriented policing involves not only greater involvement of the community, but also more creative and innovative approaches to problem solving. As citizens expect government to be both more responsive and more effective, it seems likely that community policing is here to stay. For additional information contact the Texas Regional Community Policing Institute at Sam Houston State University at (936)294-3747 or on the Web at: <http://www.cjcenter.org/trcpi>.

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