

# SUBJECT TO DEBATE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM



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May 2–3 in Milwaukee

Quadracci Pavilion,  
Milwaukee Art Museum.  
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PERF TOWN HALL MEETING

## Police Chiefs Discuss a Tough Issue: Alcohol and Drug Abuse by Officers

AT PERF'S 2012 TOWN HALL MEETING, HELD IN SAN Diego on September 30, police executives had a wide-ranging, four-hour discussion of many issues that they are currently facing. One topic that received a good deal of attention was the issue of alcohol and drug abuse by police officers. Following are a number of perspectives that were offered by participants:

### SAN DIEGO CHIEF BILL LANSDOWNE:

*Officers Know They're in Trouble and Want Help,  
But Are Afraid that Coming to Us Will Hurt Their Career*

In a period of about four months, three of my officers were charged with sexual assault, four were charged with DUI, and two were arrested for domestic violence. In response to these incidents we created our Wellness Unit.

After deciding to develop this unit, I met with every single person in our police department to figure out how this program could best help our employees.



We found that officers know when they're in trouble and they want help—whether it for prescription drug abuse, alcohol abuse, steroid use, or domestic violence.

But they're afraid to come to us, because they think that these issues will negatively impact their career path. They're afraid of what we, as administrators, are going to do with this personal information. We surveyed the entire police department, asking what their number one stressor is. And it wasn't their economic situation or family problems. The number one stressor was the administration of the police department.

Fortunately, our approach with the Wellness Unit has worked extremely well. The unit is run by a captain, who oversees four full-time officers who specialize in handling these personal problems. People who are having problems with drugs, alcohol, domestic violence, or any other issues can address them anonymously through the Wellness Unit. The unit will not bring me any specific information unless it's a criminal event or something that creates a danger to the organization. The captain in charge isn't afraid to speak her mind and advocate for the officers, even if it means butting heads with me. That develops internal trust in the program.

Initially I wasn't sure how much use this program would get. We've had it in place for about a year, and about a third of the

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PHOTOS BY TAM VIETH

department has taken advantage of this program. I credit the Wellness Unit with developing the trust of the officers and understanding that *our responsibility is to help officers manage the very stressful environment that they inhabit.*

I think we need to pay attention to our officers and their personal well-being. They will be successful if we give them the opportunity, and they will come to the organization for help if they feel that it won't ruin their career.

### **MILWAUKEE CHIEF ED FLYNN:**

#### *We Know that Policing Is a High-Stress Job, So We Need to Address Alcoholism*

We're all aware that alcohol abuse is a problem of the job. For as long as there have been police officers, alcohol has been a problem in policing.

Cops use alcohol for a variety of reasons. They use it to de-stress, they use it to relax with each other. In Wisconsin, alcohol use is socially acceptable in policing because it's a high-stress job. Secondly, alcohol is a big part of the culture in Wisconsin.



The strongest lobbying group in the state is the alcohol industry. The problems of policing and alcohol are exacerbated by the culture from which we recruit and the culture that we inhabit.

This is all a problem, of course, because alcohol affects conduct. We have a lot of officers who are arrested for DWI, and a lot of officers involved in other alcohol-related problems off duty. And we had three suicides my first year in this department, all of whom were under the influence when they killed themselves.

Evaluating these incidents, it became clear to us that officer safety isn't just about interactions with violent suspects in difficult circumstances. It's also about personal conduct and how officers treat themselves. As a culture, how do we begin to talk honestly with our officers about alcohol abuse and its effects on their careers?

When I got to the Milwaukee Police Department, the punishment for being arrested for a DWI was a three-day suspension. I've changed it to a 30-day suspension for the first offense, and termination for a second offense. In some places a DWI is an automatic termination. We haven't implemented that yet, but we may do so, because this is a significant concern of mine. It's risky to the lives and safety of our personnel and other people, and it can hurt our agency's credibility.

To work on this, we've been educating our officers, doing a lot of counseling, and trying to get our officers to talk about it. I gave one officer a 60-day suspension for his first offense, because he

was about four times over the legal limit. Now, he has dried out and he gives lectures about how sobriety has saved his career, and he doesn't want to see other officers go through what he went through.

We need to start building specific training about this, starting at the police academy. We know this is a high-stress job. We know officers self-medicate. For many of our people, when they get depressed, they drink. When they've been through stressful situations, they drink to relax. When they're working midnights and they can't sleep after work, they drink at 7:00 in the morning. We need to talk about it in intelligent ways and use a combination of penalties and education to start affecting that aspect of our culture. It can be so deadly for our officers.

### **DR. KEVIN JABLONSKI, CHIEF PSYCHOLOGIST, LAPD:**

#### *We Need to Teach Officers To Recognize Signs of Alcohol Abuse in Colleagues*

Our department is concerned about the number of individuals who are using and abusing alcohol on a regular basis. There are probably no more than 10 published scholarly studies that address this issue, and it deserves more attention than that.



We need to educate our employees about the consequences of alcohol abuse, and we also need to educate them about the signs of alcohol abuse in others. We need to tell them that they are courageous when they come forward to offer assistance to their coworkers. Almost every officer who commits suicide was under the influence of alcohol at the time and had a history of alcoholism.

Education can help address this issue, but officers also need to have ready access to resources. At the LAPD, Chief Beck has supported our Behavioral Sciences Services, which I command. We have 13 police psychologists, two sworn officers who serve as alcohol counselors, and a dietician who treats people for metabolic disorders. It's certainly not inexpensive to keep us on hand, and I know that limited resources are a concern for many chiefs. But I think that the return on investment you get from having an in-house psychological unit makes this program worthwhile. If your department is unable to have its own psychological unit, I recommend becoming well-connected with external providers.

With regard to discipline, we use contracts that officers can enter into after being involved in a DUI incident. If we think they demonstrate a commitment to recovery, we tell them that if they want to save their job and not face a significant suspension, they need to enter into a contract agreeing to abstain from alcohol, seek professional treatment, and follow all recommendations if they are seeing an LAPD psychologist.<sup>1</sup>

1. For further information Dr. Jablonski can be reached at [jablonski@lapd.lacity.org](mailto:jablonski@lapd.lacity.org).

## **TUCSON CHIEF ROBERTO VILLASEÑOR:**

### *Alcohol-Related Incidents Increased With the Economic Downturn*

About 12 to 15 years ago, our department had a number of DUIs involving officers. The chief at the time started to impose much tougher discipline policies, which were intended to serve as a deterrent.

That worked for a while, and it seemed like that problem was resolved. But as we hit the economic downturn about three years ago, I started to see many more alcohol-related and DUI incidents, including some domestic violence incidents that could be tied to alcohol or substance abuse.

We are currently struggling with that. We've even had a couple on-duty DUIs, where someone would reply to a call-out, and luckily their partners or subordinates would notice their intoxication and report them. It is an issue that we're trying to deal with. We're going to have to take a very clear stance that this behavior is unacceptable.



## **FRESNO CHIEF JERRY DYER:**

### *Termination for a Second DUI Is Not Excessively Strict*

We've recently had a number of alcohol-related incidents in Fresno. Alcohol impairs judgment, and when our judgment is impaired, we make some bad decisions. I think the bigger picture is that this is really a societal issue. Society doesn't necessarily see drunk driving as a crime, but it is a crime. In Fresno, we have taken a hard stance on this issue. We have a very good employee services program for our officers, but that still doesn't seem to be enough.

One of the challenges we face is holding our officers accountable while at the same time taking into consideration the concerns of our Police Officers' Association when it comes to imposing the appropriate level of discipline. When we were trying to increase discipline for DUIs, we researched levels of discipline in departments around the state of California. We found huge differences in how agencies address the issue. Some agencies would give a three-day suspension; others would give a 30-day suspension or have the officers use their own leave time when their license is taken away by the DMV. It was very difficult to find an organization that terminates an officer for the first drunk driving offense.

I would suggest that we develop uniform consequences across law enforcement agencies, and that we send the message



that when an officer makes the decision to get drunk and get behind the wheel of a car, we are going to deal with them severely. I believe that a 30-day suspension for first-time offenders, and termination for a second time offender, is not too strict.

## **SALT LAKE CITY POLICE CHIEF CHRIS BURBANK:**

### *I Provide Free Taxi Rides For Officers Who Have Been Drinking*

As a chief, I feel that if you violate the law, I don't want you working for me. We must hold ourselves to a higher standard. To prevent DUIs from occurring, I developed a program that I think is unique. I provide my employees one of my business cards with a signature and a list of phone numbers for the local cab companies. They are told if they have been drinking and find themselves without a ride, they can call one of these companies, give them my card and I will pay the cab fare. I have a number of employees who have utilized this program. The cab companies don't provide me the employees' names, where they drive them, or any other identifying information—just the amount of the fare. I pay the bill at the end of the month with a little extra tip to ensure my employees are well cared for.

I want my employees to know that they should never feel the need to drive intoxicated. So far, the program seems to be working well. Since its inception, we have all but eliminated officers in trouble for DUI.



## **AUSTIN CHIEF ART ACEVEDO:**

### *Officers in Texas Lose Their Peace Officer's License For a DUI Offense*

In Texas, TCLEOSE (the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education) is starting to take a very rigid stance on this issue. If an officer is convicted of a DUI, they lose their Peace Officer license for 10 years and are given a six-month hard suspension. Our officers know that if they lose their Peace Officer license, they will be out of a job.

In response, our union and our city have developed a program to provide officers with a free taxi if they find themselves under the influence. I think the wave of the future is that people will lose their officer's license for DUIs. When it comes to wellness issues, we need to set the bar high for our officers.



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### **ALBUQUERQUE CHIEF RAY SCHULTZ:**

#### *Oxycontin Cases Are Especially Difficult*

Another aspect of this conversation is prescription drug abuse, particularly Oxycontin and Oxycodone. I am finding myself dealing with prescription drug cases in my department more and more frequently, and I've found that it's particularly hard to rehabilitate officers in many of these cases. In several instances we have tried basically every type of intervention and still were unable to rehabilitate the officer. We eventually have to let them go or they resigned.



We did some research and found that many of these prescription drug problems actually started with an on-the-job injury, which means that the initial prescription came from our own city doctors. These addictions ultimately affect the officers' home lives, their quality of work, and all operations of the organization. We want to help the officers work through their problems, but we've had officers walk away in frustration, because they just know that they cannot beat the addiction. And after nine months, some were broke, with little to show for their years of service.

Addictions can be the result of a wide range of issues. As the economy continues to struggle, more officers are posting things for sale on bulletin boards, like guns, motorcycles, or boats. It's a sign that there may be something going on in that officer's life. Sometimes it is a difficult divorce, child or parental issues, and in other cases they need money for the drugs because it is the spouse who was addicted to the Oxycodone and the officer felt there was nowhere to turn for help.

Adding to this, we also have a generation of officers who rely too much on overtime. At the police academy we tell them, "Never live on overtime," but many are quick to adopt a lifestyle that depends on overtime. And if you're injured, overtime opportunities go away, and the cycle begins that can often lead to a dependency. So now when an officer is injured, our chaplains will work with them not only with the injury, but also on the officer's financial circumstances, assisting them in managing their finances. Our chaplains are telling us that in some cases, the officers are counting on as much as 15 or 20 hours of overtime per paycheck, and losing those overtime opportunities significantly impacts their lives.

### **PHILADELPHIA COMMISSIONER CHARLES RAMSEY:**

#### *Steroid Use Has Been on the Rise in Philadelphia*

Steroid use is becoming a larger problem in our department. As our officers try to stay fit and have an edge on the street, more and more of them are turning to steroids to get stronger. Not only are steroids illegal, but they also have some serious negative side effects. Some of the worst domestic violence by officers that we have seen involved "roid rage." Their whole personality changes,

and they are more aggressive when interacting with citizens. I don't know if this is becoming more prevalent nationally, but in Philadelphia I've been seeing more of these cases.

Our standard random drug testing was not detecting steroids, but starting next year, we will be testing for it.



### **NYPD ASSISTANT CHIEF**

#### **JACK DONOHUE:**

#### *We Have Begun Testing for Steroids*

A few years ago, steroid use presented a problem in New York. Our department found out when a pharmacy that was under investigation was filling Human Growth Hormone or anabolic steroid prescriptions to some of our officers. So the officers had real prescriptions, but they just didn't have medical conditions that would warrant those prescriptions.

As a result, we've instituted steroid testing as part of our randomized and for-cause drug testing processes. It can be rather expensive—about \$70 per test, that is in addition to the cost of the traditional drug screening tests—but we feel strongly enough about it that we've instituted this testing for all ranks. We've also developed statements that hold individual officers responsible for having both a legal prescription and a doctor's diagnosis that would warrant the use of that prescription. At the same time, we made officers aware of the dangers of the non-medical use of anabolic steroids and HGH. These measures have sent a message to officers that this is an issue that we are taking very seriously.

### **COPS OFFICE DIRECTOR BERNARD MELEKIAN:**

#### *This Is an Issue of Wellness and Officer Safety*

This issue is of national significance. I think one of the great paradoxes of our profession is that our officers will take a bullet for each other, but they will not look at another officer with a substance abuse problem or some other personal issue and say, "I'm going to intervene in your life." Somehow we have to change that.

The COPS Office, along with the Bureau of Justice Assistance, is involved in the Attorney General's Officer Safety and Wellness program. We have held four sessions in the last 15 months, and the focus of the most recent session was how we change the culture of policing to address this issue. Substance abuse is a disease, and officers need to make a choice to pursue wellness, but the department can help the process.

I spent 28 years in the military reserves, and the military has a very direct policy about this. If you're involved in an alcohol-related incident and you get help, there are no consequences. But if you fail to complete the program or are involved in subsequent incidents, there are very severe penalties, including removal from service.

It's unfortunate that the unions battle this to the degree that they do. I'm part of a panel on officer suicides, and we've discussed how suicides are almost always alcohol-related in some way. That

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# PERF Survey Reveals Interest By Police Departments in Using Technologies

POLICE DEPARTMENTS IN THE UNITED STATES ARE experimenting with a wide variety of technologies, ranging from automated license plate readers and in-car video recording to electronic ticket-writers, according to a survey conducted by PERF. And there is support for continuing the acquisition of technological devices, the survey found.

The brief survey was conducted in September in order to help PERF prepare for a discussion of policing technologies at PERF's 2013 Annual Meeting.

Findings from the survey include the following:

**LPRs:** 73 percent of responding departments have automated license plate readers (LPRs). The survey did not gather information about how many LPRs each department has available; many departments started with a small number of these devices, which once cost \$20,000 or more apiece. But the costs have dropped substantially, and more than 70 percent of departments said they plan to acquire LPR technology, or in the case of departments that already have it, to expand their use of it.

**GPS to track officer location:** 70 percent of agencies reported that they use GPS to monitor police officers' location—for example, by tracking the location of their patrol car. This technology not only can help protect officers' safety, but also can facilitate faster responses to calls by identifying which officer is closest to a caller's location. Of the 30 percent of departments that do not

currently have this technology, 96 percent said they plan to acquire it.

**Mobile fingerprint readers:** 48 percent of agencies reported that at least some of their officers have mobile fingerprint readers or other types of technology that help to identify suspects in the field. Of the agencies that do not have these devices, 65 percent plan to acquire them.

**Electronic ticket writers:** Officers in 59 percent of the responding agencies have devices for writing citations electronically, and 78 percent of those that do not have this technology plan to acquire it.

**In-car video recording:** 58 percent of responding police departments have in-car video recorders. Perhaps surprisingly, of the departments that said they do not have such technology, only 31 percent said they plan to acquire it. This may reflect a trend toward the use of body cameras for officers, which can record their activities whether or not they are in a patrol car or other vehicle.

**Streaming video:** Only 44 percent of responding departments said they have command center access to streaming video from in-car, wearable, or fixed surveillance cameras. But among the departments that lack such technology, 61 percent said they plan to acquire it. And among the departments that do have streaming video, 89 percent plan to expand their use of this technology. 

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and prescription drug abuse are both significant problems. We need to talk about wellness and safety in the same way that we talk about bullet-resistant vests and tactical approaches. This disease is killing our officers at the same rate.

## **POLICE FOUNDATION PRESIDENT JIM BUEERMANN:**

### *We Must Encourage Officers to Take Shared Responsibility for Each Other*

Prior to coming to the Police Foundation, I worked in the Redlands Police Department, which is a smaller organization than most of the ones we've heard from today. There are advantages and disadvantages to managing a smaller department, but the advantage on this issue is that the organization is much more family-like. You can interact with your officers in the way a precinct commander might interact with his officers in a larger department.

After two of our officers left the profession, one due to alcoholism and the other due to mental illness, I discovered that

some of their fellow officers and a couple of their sergeants had known that these guys were having problems. I had to ask myself why members of my "family" were not telling me that they were having problems.

We need to reach a point where officers will not perceive the department leaders as a threat if they seek help for themselves or a coworker. In Redlands we started to resolve this by having a very clear dialogue. We talked about the shared obligation we have to take care of each other. We emphasized that our officers need to have the courage to reach out to someone who is struggling and say, "You're struggling, and I'm not going to let you fall off that cliff."

I realize that this can be a much easier discussion to have at a smaller agency, but the concept of shared responsibility is important, whether you work in the Redlands PD or the NYPD. 



# Police Leaders Discuss Response to Active Shooters

PERF'S 2012 TOWN HALL MEETING IN SAN DIEGO led off with a discussion of the police response to "active shooter" situations, including the July 20 incident at a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, in which James Holmes allegedly killed 12 people and injured 58 others. Other recent incidents include the August 5 incident in suburban Milwaukee in which a gunman killed six people at a Sikh temple before fatally shooting himself, and the September 27 incident in Minneapolis in which a man who had lost his job at a sign company shot four people to death and wounded four others before taking his own life.

Aurora Police Chief Dan Oates attended the Town Hall Meeting and spoke briefly about the movie theater shooting. He expressed pride in his officers and their response to the incident, and thanked all of the other law enforcement agencies in the Denver metro area for their prompt response.

Mass shootings are more common than one might realize. The United States experienced 645 mass-murder events—killings with at least four victims—between 1976 and 2010, according to one expert.<sup>1</sup>

In what PERF Executive Director Chuck Wexler called "a sign of the times," Houston Mayor Annise Parker recently released a six-minute YouTube video called "Run, Hide, Fight," which dramatically depicts a workplace mass shooting in order to teach people how to respond if they are ever involved in such an incident.<sup>2</sup>



Aurora, CO Chief Dan Oates (LEFT) and Houston Police Chief Charles McClelland (RIGHT).

Mayor Parker told CBS News that it's important for people to know what to do in a crisis, rather than having to stop and guess. Furthermore, many people's first instinct is to hide, but usually that is not the best response, she indicated. "As we clearly say in the video, the first thing you need to do is get the heck out of there," Parker said.

Thus, the video advises people to run if a safe path is available, to "always try and escape or evacuate, even if others insist on staying." If getting out of the building is not possible, the video urges viewers to find a place to hide. And "as a last resort, working together or alone, use improvised weapons and fight."

At the PERF Town Hall Meeting, Houston Chief Charles McClelland described the reasoning behind the video:

## HOUSTON POLICE CHIEF CHARLES MCCLELLAND:

### We Produced a Video Called "Run, Hide, Fight"

Our mayor knew that first responders are well-prepared and well-trained in responding to active shooters, but she was concerned about the general public. We wanted to be proactive in arming the public with information that may save their lives—and not just with a brochure, but with a video they can see. [As of mid-October, the "Run, Hide, Fight" video has been viewed more than 1.4 million times on YouTube.]

We purposefully did not copyright this. You can download it free; we made it for the benefit of the entire nation. We require our non-sworn employees to view this video, because we don't want to have our own people just wait to die if there's an active shooter situation, thinking that they're going to be saved by first responders. It may work out that way, but it may not. These events happen quickly.

1. "Colorado shootings add chapter to long, unpredictable story of U.S. mass murder." Washington Post, July 24, 2012. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/colorado-shootings-add-chapter-to-long-unpredictable-story-of-us-mass-murder/2012/07/24/gJQAK6Xe7W\\_story.html?hpid=z4](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/colorado-shootings-add-chapter-to-long-unpredictable-story-of-us-mass-murder/2012/07/24/gJQAK6Xe7W_story.html?hpid=z4)

See also "Active Shooter: Recommendations and Analysis for Risk Mitigation." New York City Police Department, 2010. This report includes

a compendium of 281 active shooter incidents. <http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/downloads/pdf/counterterrorism/ActiveShooter.pdf>

2. "After Recent Shooting, City Officials Reinforce Run, Hide, Fight." Press statement, Office of Mayor Annise Parker. July 26, 2012. <http://www.houstongovnewsroom.org/go/doc/2155/1503451/>

Minneapolis Acting Chief Janee Harteau (LEFT) and Columbus, OH Chief Kimberley Jacobs (RIGHT).

**Chuck Wexler:** *What kind of response are you getting? The video is a bit shocking, not what you expect to see in a public service announcement, when it depicts the rapid-fire shooting of victims. Is anyone complaining that you are scaring people?*

**Chief McClelland:** The response has all been positive. I've had many requests for the video from departments across the country.

### **MINNEAPOLIS ACTING CHIEF JANEE HARTEAU:**

*Minneapolis Just Had an Active Shooter,  
So We See the Need for the Video*

Up until just last Thursday, if we had wanted to produce a video like this in Minneapolis, people would have said, "No, you're going to scare the community." But on Thursday we had an active shooter, a disgruntled employee who shot and killed six people. So I think people realize that there's a need for police to put out information like this to keep the community informed and adequately prepared.

Within the last two years, we had conducted active shooter training in a downtown office building and in our schools. Because of our planning ahead and training, our cops were prepared. I am very proud of how our officers responded to the shooting at the sign company. There were 26 people in that building, and we had a lot of street cops running inside when everyone else was running out. There is no doubt in my mind that because of that, lives were saved.



### **COLUMBUS, OH CHIEF KIMBERLEY JACOBS:**

*We Have Similar Information on Our Website*

We don't have a video like this, but we have active shooter information on our website. It provides guidance along the same lines, urging people to evacuate if possible, to hide out if they cannot leave the building, and as a last resort to take action against the shooter. It's available to everybody who wants to learn how to react to an active shooter.

I consider this a personal message to the community that we need to make. They need to know what to do. We should not leave it up to them to figure it out; we need to give them some advice. We have liaison officers who take this information to community meetings and discuss it. 



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PERF TOWN HALL MEETING

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