

**HOW WILL THE SOUTH BAY POLICE DEPARTMENTS OF LOS  
ANGELES COUNTY MEET ADVANCED OFFICER TRAINING NEEDS  
BY THE YEAR 2003?**

JOURNAL ARTICLE

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**This Command College Independent Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue in law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future but rather to project a number of possible scenarios for strategic planning consideration.**

**Defining the future differs from analyzing the past because the future has not yet happened. In this project, useful alternatives have been formulated systematically so that the planner can respond to a range of possible future environments.**

**Managing the future means influencing the future--creating it, constraining it, adapting to it. A futures study points the way.**

**The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College project are those of the author and are not necessarily those of the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).**

One of the greatest responsibilities of any law enforcement agency is the proper training of its personnel. However in today's climate, there is an increasing demand to provide more and more training while many departments lack the resources to accomplish such training. The California State Legislature has mandated and continues to mandate additional training for police personnel. The public in the aftermath of several high profile incidents such as the Rodney King incident, the OJ Simpson trial, the LA riots and others, has developed a higher expectation of the performance of its police officers. Consider the almost daily media coverage of real-time police pursuits shown on television. Additionally, communities are tackling many new quality of life issues such as noise, density, and traffic concerns that are being assigned more and more to be handled by their police departments.

Most police departments struggle to keep up with these new training demands despite budget and staffing cutbacks. Training is expensive not only in dollars but in the commitment of time, personnel and other resources to accomplish the various types of training required. Consider the duration of the law enforcement training academies. Twenty years ago, the training academy lasted approximately four months. Most academies now last as long as six months. When coupled with the new field training officer programs, it takes nearly one year from the time of hire to get a recruit police officer out on the street. Considering the dilemma that many police departments are beginning to have with the loss of personnel as the baby boomers are beginning to retire, the problem is becoming more acute as police departments struggle to find new police recruits to replace these veteran officers.

There are many departments that have not suffered budgetary reductions in personnel, but at the same time have not seen the needed increases in personnel to keep up with public service demands. The dilemma occurs in trying to maintain training standards while keeping enough

officers out on the street. Police Chief Norm Stamper of Seattle, Washington made the following statement regarding training conditions within his department, “Due to budget constraints, we are unable to provide all of the training we would like, although currently we do provide all mandated training.”<sup>1</sup> Doesn’t this seem to be the case with many police agencies?

The State of California established the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) in 1959. It was the intention of the Legislature to ensure that California had the best peace officers in the country. The primary functions of POST were to:

- set standards for peace officer selection and training that law enforcement agencies voluntarily comply with, and
- assist agencies with the cost of training, thus encouraging the complete training of peace officers and voluntary compliance with standards.<sup>2</sup>

In fiscal year 1990/91 POST had an operating budget of \$44.7 million. By fiscal year 1995/96 this operating budget dropped to \$33.5 million while the number of police officers in the State continued to increase.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately through the lobbying efforts of the California Chiefs of Police in concert with the efforts of POST, the coming 1998/99 fiscal year POST budget has been increased to \$43 million. However, with the growth in the number of police officers in the State and now public safety dispatchers that come under the POST umbrella, there is an increasing need for additional training with fewer resources to accomplish the task. During the past years with the loss of budget dollars, POST has had to cut reimbursements for training.

Most departments have been fending for themselves to accomplish their training needs. In essence, it is every police department for itself. Those departments with well-funded budgets and adequate staffing are able to provide a wide variety of training opportunities for their personnel. These training courses range from inservice training such as weaponless defense and first aid to providing POST certified courses in which members of other police agencies are able

to attend. Some departments have the funds to bring in very specialized training courses not reimbursed by POST. Some departments enjoy excellent facilities and equipment to provide training for their personnel. These departments are able to maintain even higher standards of training than those standards established by POST. However, there are those departments lacking the funds and staff necessary to keep up with these higher levels of training. How are these departments expected to keep up? If one of these less fortunate departments becomes involved in a major incident that results in litigation, wouldn't it be possible for the plaintiff's attorney to point their finger at the richer departments in the region and ask why the defendant department's level of training was not the same as the neighbors? While some departments have suffered severe budget cutbacks they still have to strive to keep up with the standards of training mandated by the State and by POST.

This was the concern of the Police Chiefs of the South Bay region of Los Angeles County. It has been their desire to see further efforts in developing regional training among the South Bay Police Departments. The South Bay consists of 9 small to moderate size police departments. The cities are: El Segundo, Gardena, Hawthorne, Hermosa Beach, Inglewood, Manhattan Beach, Palos Verdes Estates, Redondo Beach and Torrance. This region of cities with Los Angeles Airport to the north and Los Angeles Harbor to the south is surrounded by jurisdictions policed by either the Los Angeles Police Department or the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. The combined total authorized sworn strength of these departments for the current 1998/99 fiscal year is 917 officers.<sup>4</sup> Some of these Cities operate with well-funded budgets while others have suffered severe budget cuts and reductions in police personnel in the past few years. Rather than let every department fend for itself it would make the most sense to pool resources and establish a regional training center to meet the training demands of tomorrow.

## **ONE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM**

The largest city in the South Bay is the City of Torrance. Next to the Torrance municipal airport is a parcel of city property that is currently being leased by a manufacturing firm. The lease is going to run out soon and the location would be ideal for a regional training center. The local junior college, El Camino also located in Torrance, is very interested in supporting a regional training center. With the support and certification of El Camino College, the training facility would receive educational monies from the State of California that are reimbursed each year based upon the Full Time Equivalent Student (FTES) formula. The amount of educational dollars received is based upon the total number of students attending courses and the total number of hours of instruction provided. El Camino College and the regional training facility would form a partnership and share the educational monies reimbursed. The courses offered at the regional training center would be POST certified as well as college certified for lower division credits. This type of arrangement has been successfully done in other areas of Southern California such as at the San Bernardino County Sheriff's training center, Rio Hondo College in Whittier and Golden West College in Huntington Beach. El Camino College already has existing contracts with other government agencies to certify their different curriculums of training.

Additionally, the fire departments of the South Bay region no longer have a fire training facility. The fire tower in Inglewood was recently closed. This property in Torrance could serve as a training center for the South Bay Fire Departments as well. In fact, this regional training center could offer a number of different training courses in different disciplines. The South Bay region is a diverse makeup of special industries and businesses which includes airports, oil refineries and large concentrations of aerospace. This diverse mixture creates a number of new

training demands that need to be met. These demands would include training in such areas as hazardous materials, SEMS training, terrorist activity, and better-prepared responses to natural disasters such as earthquakes and other unusual incidents. This complexity requires an even greater need for joint police and fire training exercises that could be well served at a regional training center. The more courses offered, the more valuable the facility would become to the South Bay region in meeting the variety of government as well as private industry needs.

### **POLITICAL WILL**

In order to establish such a regional training center, the key persons to make this happen are the city managers of the South Bay region and in particular, the City Manager of Torrance. These persons are the “critical mass” or change agents needed to make a regional training center a reality. While funding would certainly be a major obstacle to building such a facility, the support of the city managers is even more critical than funding. If the support exists for a training center, the funding would be found.

There can be tremendous benefits to a regional training center. Perhaps the greatest benefit is the standardization of training practices. All of the police officers of the region would learn how to handle pursuits, handcuff suspects, conduct felony car stops or train new police officers in a standardized method. This regional approach to training would eliminate the varying training standards and practices in the same geographical region. The pooling of resources to raise training standards would be enjoyed by all of the departments of the region and not just those departments with well-funded budgets.

Regional training would also develop greater networking and cooperation between police agencies. “When officers from different agencies train together, they become familiar with one

another's personnel and agency operations. They know one another's strengths and resources."<sup>5</sup> Consider the improved effectiveness of police agencies to handle multi-jurisdictional incidents.

A regional training center would also provide a location to conduct multiple-discipline training such as joint police and fire training exercises. A drivers training facility could be built to accommodate not only police but fire officers as well. The facility could also be rented out to other government agencies and private companies to meet their training needs.

To be truly successful a regional training center would have to be run like a business. Having this in mind, it must offer a diverse range of courses to a number of different customers both public and private enabling the training center to develop its own source of funding. The training programs at Rio Hondo, Golden West and El Camino Colleges and the San Bernardino County Sheriff's training center all operate at a profit. The more courses offered, the more customers that are served, which means the more educational dollars that would be received each year to make the training center self sustaining and viable.

#### **FUTURE TRAINING - REGIONAL**

The pooling of resources within the South Bay region is a more efficient and effective use of those resources. Instead of nine separate training programs, there would be a master program. Departments would save time and money since they can train their officers at a local training site. Officers from within the South Bay would have the opportunity to serve as instructors thus enhancing the caliber of personnel within the region.

The cities of the South Bay must realize the tremendous benefits to a regional training center. The world is changing so fast and the demand to keep up will always be there. Albert Einstein said, "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."<sup>6</sup> We cannot continue to think that we can do

business as usual. We must be adaptable to our changing environment in order to compete and be effective. It is foolish to believe that we need only worry about what occurs within our own cities or departments. We must take a more regional approach to accomplish training. What occurs in one agency can and will impact what occurs in other agencies. Regional training can be a great benefit to our police officers if we think regionally. There are successful examples of it all over the country. It simply requires bringing together the key critical people to make it happen.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur G. Sharp, "Does Training keep up with the Times?," *Law and Order* (December 1997): 44.

<sup>2</sup> California Peace Officers Association (CPOA), *Report to the Legislature on Restoring Funding for Law Enforcement Training in California*, May 1994, iii

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7

<sup>4</sup> Information directly obtained by the author, July 1998.

<sup>5</sup> William M. Toms and Stephen G. McAllister, "Interagency Drug Training," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* (November 1996): 8

<sup>6</sup> Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, (New York, New York: Fireside, Simon & Schuster Publishers, 1989), p. 42

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