

Introduction

Good morning. My name is Richard Williams and I am the Chief of Police for the Las Cruces Police Department. I have been a law enforcement officer for (20) twenty years. I began my career with the New Mexico State Police and I have been stationed in many communities throughout New Mexico. I have witnessed rural law enforcement and metropolitan law enforcement during my career and I have intimate knowledge of the DWI problem in New Mexico.

The Las Cruces Police Department is authorized (183) one hundred and eighty-three commissioned officers and we patrol (77) seventy seven square miles of municipal boundary in southern New Mexico. Our community has a population of approximately (97,000) ninety seven thousand people, according to the 2010 census numbers and our officers answered (158,000) one hundred and fifty eight thousand calls for service in 2010.

Nature of the Problem

The City of Las Cruces has its share of DWI problems and new offenders who move into or visit our community each year. Our city is blessed to have a major university (New Mexico State University), and is surrounded by (3) three military installations (White Sands Missile Range, Fort Bliss Army Installation, and Holloman Air Force Base). We also have numerous dairies, farms and ranches that surround our municipality. There is no shortage of new offenders as we have a revolving population that lives and works in our community. Approximately (75%) seventy-five percent of our arrests involve first time offenders.

In researching the statistics surrounding this topic, I found that the Las Cruces Police Department on average apprehends approximately (522) five hundred twenty-two DWI offenders each year. The Sheriff's Department apprehends a similar amount and the New Mexico State Police arrests close to (400) four hundred DWI offenders. Law enforcement in Dona Ana County apprehends between (1,300 – 1,600) one thousand three hundred and one thousand six hundred DWI offenders each year. We also investigate on average (4) four fatal crashes in the City of Las Cruces each year with half of these crashes involving alcohol. The advances in vehicle safety and technology can only do so much when an impaired person decides to drive drunk.

Law Enforcement's Perspective

Law enforcement is at the front in the efforts to stop DWI offenders. When all other efforts do not stop an offender from driving drunk, we rely on our officers to physically stop these offenders and remove them from our streets.

There are several things law enforcement has done extremely well at as we work to enhance public and traffic safety.

- Many agencies have made the apprehension and criminal prosecution of offenders as a significant priority for their agencies and have included these efforts in their strategic plan, goals, and strategies.
- Many agencies seek grant funding to augment normal patrol efforts to apprehend DWI offenders through operations such as DWI Checkpoints, Directed Patrols, and Saturation Patrols.

- Some jurisdictions have implemented a vehicle seizure program to stop repeat offenders and to target those who are arrested for Driving with a Revoked Drivers License.
 - Last year we seized (348) three hundred forty-eight vehicles that were either driven by repeat drunk drivers or those with a revoked license.
- Many agencies participate in education and awareness campaigns such as the 100 Days and Nights of Summer campaign, driver's education programs, and various other programs designed to increase the awareness of the problems associated with this crime.

There are still many challenges that law enforcement faces as we strive to apprehend and prosecute these offenders.

- The difficulties the average officer has in identifying drug impaired driving as compared to alcohol impaired driving.
- There is an enormous amount of paperwork associated with the arrest of a DWI offender. This large amount of paperwork ties up an officer for (1 to 3) one to three hours during a shift for a single arrest and takes the officer out of service to our community.
 - Our call volume is ever increasing and these lengthy investigations are taking away from time spent on traffic patrol or proactive patrol.
- Officers are facing ever increasing difficult court battles and the traditional standard of proof beyond a reasonable doubt is now evolving into proof beyond all doubt.

- Administrative revocation hearings have in some areas been turned into discovery hearings that go well beyond the scope of the license revocations.
- Challenges to traditional sobriety testing methods have caused officers to limit their testimony regarding Horizontal Gaze Nystagmus.
- Budget constraints and limited resources are also impacting our ability to proactively search for impaired drivers as we strive to answer calls for service.

Future Considerations

DWI enforcement will remain a priority for law enforcement as the number offenders will never completely diminish. We have seen a reduction in the number of arrests for DWI and it is our hope that the message is getting through to our citizens that it is no longer socially acceptable to drive drunk.

Law enforcement will continue to place a significant emphasis on traffic safety and the apprehension of impaired drivers. We must create a perception of risk so that offenders weigh the costs and risks associated with driving impaired. While we have come a long way the problem still exists. We must make the enforcement of DWI laws a priority and law enforcement has a huge role in securing our communities.

Thank you and I'll stand for questions.