

## **Burlington (NC) Police Department Destination Zero 2015 Executive Summary**

Beginning in 2013, the Burlington (NC) Police Department unofficially embarked on a campaign to improve officer safety. Over the last two years we have purchased equipment, implemented training, and changed policies all with the overarching goal of reducing officer injuries and preventing the death of a police officer. The only officer killed in the line of duty in Burlington was Officer Sonny Vaughn who was killed during a burglary on December 7, 1938. In training classes here at the BPD you might regularly hear the Police Chief say things like, "we are not going to bury another officer" and "I do not want to ever hand a folded flag to a spouse." This theme of officer safety is paramount to the success of our agency.

In keeping with the Destination Zero categories, our organizational enhancements in the area of General Officer Safety include significant monetary investments in ballistic technology for our officers and vehicles, improvements to existing handguns in the form of mounted lights and access to additional long guns. We have provided tactical medical kits and scenario based training to every officer as well as additional lifesaving training exceeding the state requirements.

In the area of Traffic Safety for Officers our enhancements include improved vehicle safety with push bumpers, radar mounts and redesigned cages and antennas that all result in improved visibility and safety. We have reinforced already strong policies and committed to skilled training delivered on the Below 100 program and increased defensive driving.

In the area of Physical Fitness and Safety we have made extraordinary gains by investing over \$100,000 in a gym and fitness facility as well as reinforcing the importance of this with a mandatory fitness program with annual testing. We have created classes on "how to eat on the beat", provided nutritional counseling and give out water and Gatorade on hot days in the summer.

And lastly in the area of Emotional Wellbeing we have created a formal Peer Support Team consisting of 19 trained sworn officers and civilians who are available for stress management conversations, defusings and critical incident stress debriefings. We have six chaplains in a well-established program caring for the spiritual side of our officers and involve officers and their spouses in wide ranging programs for financial stability and advanced education.

The Burlington Police Department remains committed to increasing Officer Safety and continue to add new programs, equipment and training as well continually re-evaluating existing programs to ensure that officers are getting the most support in the most effective way possible.

## **Burlington (NC) Police Department Destination Zero 2015 Project Narrative**

Beginning in 2013, the Burlington (NC) Police Department unofficially embarked on a campaign to improve officer safety. Over the last two years we have purchased equipment, implemented training, and changed policies all with the overarching goal of reducing officer injuries and preventing the death of a police officer. The only officer killed in the line of duty in Burlington was Officer Sonny Vaughn who was killed during a burglary on December 7, 1938. In training classes here at the BPD you might regularly hear the Police Chief say things like, "we are not going to bury another officer" and "I do not want to ever hand a folded flag to a spouse." This theme of officer safety is paramount to the success of our agency.

For **General Officer Safety**, the actions of the Burlington Police Department are as follows:

1. **Implementing mandatory minimum staffing in the patrol division:** Prior to 2014, we had established squad sizes based on allocated staffing. Due to training, vacation and sick calls, any given squad might be reduced to a small handful of officers with no attention paid to the negative impact on officer safety. Upon creating a mandatory minimum of 10 officers, additional officers are called in on overtime to ensure adequate staffing and increase officer safety.
2. **An enhanced mandatory ballistic vest program:** Prior to 2014 we had a mandatory ballistic vest program, but there were a number of loopholes and exceptions. In an effort to ensure our ballistic vest program was a leader in the nation, we undertook the following modifications:
  - a. We eliminated doctor's notes/excuses. Similar to a firearms qualification, if you cannot wear your body armor, then you cannot work your shift.
  - b. Visible evidence of the importance of body armor was extended to the leadership of the agency. The former exception that allowed administrative officers to not wear body armor was removed. When the chiefs are in uniform (almost every day) they are performing as role models wearing a full duty belt and body armor at all times.
  - c. Our previous policy authorized reimbursement for Level IIA vests. This was changed and we now allow the purchase (at agency cost) of IIA, II, and IIIA vests. Any carriers that show wear are immediately replaced at no cost to the officer.
3. **Purchased tactical ceramic ballistic panels:** With the increasing frequency of active shooter situations across America, we purchased front and back ceramic plates in tactical carriers that are rated to withstand rifle fire in excess of level IIIa protection for every first responder. The equipment is to be carried on the front seat of the vehicle and immediately accessible for deployment in any situation.
4. **Purchased ballistic helmets:** Again, based on the violence level in society, we took the step to custom fit and order ballistic helmets for every first responder. This equipment is kept in the assigned vehicle and is immediately available for deployment when necessary.

5. Purchased handgun mounted flashlights: Knowing the ratio in which officers are involved in deadly force encounters in low light conditions, we purchased weapon mounted lights and new holsters for every single officer.
6. Purchased and installed vehicle mounted flashlights: We purchased new StreamlightStinger flashlights for every officer. The car charger was mounted in their assigned vehicle and they were issued a new duty belt ring for the flashlight and a charger for home as well.
7. Implemented a patrol rifle program: Officers were previously barred from carrying a personally owned rifle. This policy was changed and we began a training program and authorized the carry of a wide range of departmentally approved long guns. We currently have approximately 15 personally owned rifles carried by patrol officers. In addition, the number of weapons issued by the agency was increased from 24 to 45. Including SRT operators deployed in patrol we have approximately above a 50 percent deployment ratio.
8. Off-duty and back-up carry handgun program: While the department had technically approved back-up weapons, there was a complicated and unnecessary approval process and the practice was unofficially discouraged. A new emphasis was placed on this tactic/equipment and the hurdles were removed. We now have more than ten percent of our officers who are approved to carry back-up weapons.
9. Portable ballistic shields: We purchased and deployed 10 portable ballistic shields. These shields roll in a compact fashion to allow for easy transportation and quick deployment. With five on day shift and five on night shift nearly half of the available officers are properly equipped with this added level of protection.
10. Rip Hobble restraint devices: We purchased and issued Rip Hobble Restraint devices to every officer. They were properly trained on their deployment in order to reduce officer injury and potential escape from suspects with a certain level of violence or who have priors for escape.
11. Tactical medical kits: We purchased tactical medical kits including a tourniquet, battle dressing, and other supplies. The kits are personally issued to each officer and are small enough for these lifesaving tools to be carried in their cargo pocket or kept on the front seat of their car. After a four hour training class, each officer is capable of "self-aid" or "buddy aid" in order to help increase officer survivability after critical injuries in the line of duty.
12. Training Facility: While we possessed a state of the art training facility including 2 firearms ranges and classroom facilities, we added turning targets to the main range. This addition has allowed us to add a more consistent element of time pressure to our training environment. Our experience shows officers are improving their draw time and are more quickly putting rounds on target as they transition from "shooting paper" to learning to "gun fight."
13. Practice Ammo: Each officer is allocated 100 rounds of practice ammunition per month.
14. Simunitions: We purchased simunition guns and all of the required safety equipment in order to conduct more effective "force on force" type training.
15. Additional Training: NC law requires 24 hours of mandatory in service training and an additional 16 hours of training dictated by the agency.
  - a. In addition to these 40 hours of training, we have required every officer to attend 8 hours of training on "The Warrior Mindset and Surviving Deadly Force Encounters." This

training uses video segments and real case studies to drive home the importance of training and mindset in surviving police work.

b. We have also required every officer to attend training on the Below 100 program.

16. Less Lethal Options: All patrol officers now have an assigned Taser as well as the availability of larger canisters of OC spray and less lethal shotguns.
17. Automatic Vehicle Locator (AVL) System: We installed the AVL system in patrol cars to better locate officers in crisis and ensure perimeters are properly established, increasing safety.
18. Unlimited access to FATS: We partnered with the Alamance Community College to supply a FATS training simulator with unlimited access that is located in our range training classroom.

For **Officer Safety-Traffic**, the actions of the Burlington Police Department are as follows:

1. Mandatory Seatbelts: We modified the seatbelt policy to become more practical and believe full enforcement of the policy has resulted in a high rate of voluntary compliance.
2. Purchased Push bumpers: Beginning with the 2014 vehicles, we installed front push bumpers on all newly purchased vehicles. This equipment will reduce injuries from low-speed collisions and deer strikes and also reduce the risk of injuries when moving disabled vehicles from the roadway.
3. Re-design of vehicle interiors: Using our "Vehicle Committee" this employee based group evaluated the interior design in order to improve visibility, reduce distractions, and increase safety. The newest vehicles have clear Lexan cages rather than mesh wire cages improving visibility. Antennas and other equipment were moved from the middle of the trunk lid to the sides giving better front to back visibility. Radar mounts replaced Velcro to secure these devices and prevent them from injuring officers during collisions. New MDC stands integrated power and reduced cords making it easier for officers to exit the vehicle on the passenger side in an emergency.
4. Ballistic panels installed: Beginning with the 2013 new vehicles, ballistic panels have been installed in the driver side door panel to increase officer safety.
5. Increased lights and markings for vehicles: In 2011 we purchased ten vehicles and did not install top lights as a cost saving measure. One of those vehicles was involved in a crash bringing to light this vulnerability. Additional lighting and appropriate reflective striping was added to make these vehicles safer. New graphics were also added to other vehicles making them more visible and safer.
6. New high visibility traffic vests and gloves: Officers were issued new ANSI 207-2006 compliant tear-away and highly reflective vests. We also make available reflective gloves and battery powered wands for traffic direction. We have a zero tolerance policy to not wearing this safety equipment in the roadway.
7. Comprehensive training program: Two years ago we modified the review process for collisions to increase accountability. We now mandate a visit with the entire executive staff to explain the causal factors after a crash. Those found to have preventable crashes are required to attend remedial training. We also required all of our officers to attend additional training on stop stick

deployment. A policy modification drives home the safety issues and stop sticks must now be deployed from a position of cover and the officer cannot run into the roadway after deployment.

8. Below 100 Training: All officers attended the Below 100 training that reinforces safe driving and safety in the roadway.

To increase **Physical Fitness/Safety**, the actions of the Burlington Police Department are as follows:

1. Mandatory Physical Fitness: Beginning in 2013, we began a lengthy process to implement a mandatory fitness policy. All new employees hired after January 1, 2014 immediately became responsible for passing the fitness test twice per year. Effective January 1, 2016 all tenured employees will have the same requirement.
2. Constructed Gym Facility: In order to increase the buy-in from employees and increase the likelihood of success, we renovated a city warehouse into a gym facility. We have invested over \$100,000 thus far on this project. The Belmont Training Facility (BTF) is available to all first responders in the county and is open 24/7 free of charge. We have:
  - a. 700 square feet of padded mat for arrest tactics training
  - b. 620 square feet of space for Crossfit training
  - c. 416 square feet of free weights
  - d. 965 square feet of weight machines and cardio equipment
  - e. Full showers including clean bath towels and hand towel service
  - f. An additional 4000 square feet dedicated to the annual fitness testing apparatus
  - g. An on-site training officer/fitness coach trained in Cooper and other specialties and available instructors for Crossfit and yoga, plus Pilates and fitness tapes.
3. Mandatory yearly physical: Each employee is required to have an annual physical.
4. Free Occupational Health Clinic: All city employees have access to the Occupational Health Clinic which is staffed by two nurses and a doctor and operates M-F, 8-5 at no cost to employees and adult family. Wide ranging services are available for free.
5. Wellness Council Programs: The city sponsored Wellness Council offers smoking cessation programs, nutrition programs, massages and healthy living programs throughout the year and the department actively promotes participation in these programs.
6. Nutritional Training: The department hosted a "train the trainer" program on "How to Eat on the Beat" and nutrition classes to help improve wellness. These classes discussed the unique nature of eating during shiftwork and taught officers to make smart choices at work.
7. On Duty Exercise: Officers are encouraged to work out in the BTF on duty or off, and have access to a full time training officer who maintains the facility and helps develop personal fitness programs for officers.
8. Fitness Reimbursement and/or Free YMCA membership: In addition to free use of the BTF, all officers are given a free YMCA membership and the city will additionally reimburse up to \$100 per year for a private gym membership of their choosing.

9. Hydration supplies and education: During periods of excessively hot weather, the department provides free Gatorade and water to employees. Color coded charts have been installed in the restrooms in order to help employees self-evaluate the color of their urine to better hydrate.

For Emotional Wellbeing/Safety, the actions of the Burlington Police Department are as follows:

1. Peer Support Team Created: The department created a Peer Support Team and properly trained them to care for their peers. We have 19 members and a strong policy to guide this program. Continual training reminds supervisors to activate the team for “defusings” after medium size events and full Critical Incident Stress Debriefings (CISD) after major events. Attendance is mandatory for all officers involved in a shooting incident or other critical incident.
2. Shooting Investigation Team formed: An officer Involved Shooting Team was formed to investigate all officer involved shootings. The team is comprised of officers from within the department which provides a sense of stability and reduces stress in these types of incidents.
3. Police chaplain program: Our program consists of six different pastors who offer weekly devotionals and messages of inspiration on Sundays in a rotational basis. They are on call and available 24/7 to consult with officers and allow officers access to support regardless of their personal faith or denomination.
4. Employee Assistance Program: The city offers an Employee Assistance Program for our members at no cost. This includes counseling visits, substance abuse referrals and other programs. Periodic training from Human Resources and a leadership commitment help support this vital program.
5. Committee Involvement: The department has developed several employee committees, such as the vehicle committee, uniform committee and recruiting committee which are designed to increase officer involvement in creating policies and guiding the future of the department. Having input in this way increases the inclusive nature of our organization, builds morale, and increases job satisfaction over time.
6. Partners Off Duty program: This is a program that continues to evolve. The goal is to help spouses and family members of officers understand the unique issues which Law Enforcement officers face. Fiscal management classes are available as well as a new employee orientation session.
7. Educational Benefit: The department actively promotes higher education and advanced degrees are highly encouraged. We allow flexible schedules for officers to attend college classes and further their education. A tuition reimbursement program is available.