

Destination Zero 2019 Officer Traffic Safety Submission

Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office, Louisiana

The Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office was established in 1832 when neighboring St. Helena Parish was split in two. Livingston parish was a poor rural community with small farms with timber being the major industry. Livingston Parish was a suburban area of neighboring Baton Rouge with few tax producing business and not much growth. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, businesses began coming to Livingston Parish and the population exploded. Known for good schools and low violent crime, the population has almost doubled since that time, with the current number being about 140,138 and growing. We are the fastest growing parish in the state. Livingston Parish is about 703 square miles and is transected by Interstate 12, which is a shortcut around New Orleans on I-10, the major interstate in the southern United States. The office currently has 305 employees of which 240 are sworn deputies.

In 1999, a deputy with the Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office in Louisiana made an improper left turn and caused a three car accident with injures to two people. He received a write up for being in an at fault crash. Three months later, this deputy rear ended another vehicle causing an injury. The deputy received a three day suspension and was assigned to the detention center for three days. After returning to patrol duty, a citizen called in a speeding complaint on the deputy which resulted in a three day suspension and a one month assignment to the detention center. Both of these crashes resulted in lawsuits against the Sheriff's office, which were settled.

The deputy was later promoted to shift supervisor with the rank of lieutenant. About a year later, on August 24, 2000, this same deputy ran off the road while exceeding the speed limit, damaging the unit. Later that same day, this same deputy crashed his personal vehicle in an at fault crash. The result was a demotion to the rank of deputy, with resulting loss in pay, and transfer to the detention center, where he remained for fourteen months. This deputy had become a liability to the office and despite a credible 13 year career with the office was now back to where he started in 1987, a deputy in the detention center.

Since that day in August 2000, that deputy not been involved in any at fault crashes and is now a Major in charge of uniform operations for the office. The harsh reality was that his career was being jeopardized by his inability to exhibit good judgment while driving. He made a decision that was going to change and he did. His life and career and the lives of all the other people on the road where not worth driving a few extra miles per hour. Since being promoted to a position of responsibility for all patrol deputies, he has had the "not worth it" conversation with many young and even older deputies. They are always surprised to hear the story and how he worked from being a liability to the office to an asset.

The Sheriff also realized that a more personal approach to reducing crashes could be implemented. A simple cost effective suggestion that was implemented was an incentive based idea. Deputies that went a year without an at fault vehicle incident or crash got an extra week of vacation. Since new deputies only get one week of vacation for up to five years' service, this was a nice incentive and helped reduce the amount of at fault crashes and incidents at the time.

Although most if not all agencies have polices in place covering the safe driving of office vehicles, many have active monitoring of vehicles operation, many have rewards or incentives for good driving, I know of no other agency that rewards their employees with an extra week of vacation. One of the first questions an employee asks when involved in even a minor vehicle incident is if he lost his incentive week.

The idea behind any driver improvement program is to reduce crashes and promote safety. No one wants to hurt someone accidentally and in our case can affect our career, health and liberty. The Sheriff takes great pride in a professional appearance of our uniform and vehicles, so backing into a post or tree or sideswiping a mailbox costs him money that could be used elsewhere. The Sheriff realizes this every time we are served with a lawsuit and has taken steps to reduce the number of fleet crashes. He has continued the incentive vacation week program and initiated and requires employees who drive office vehicles to attend a pursuit driving class and regular retraining. This not only includes driving on a track, but classroom instruction on how to safely operate vehicles in ordinary every day duties.

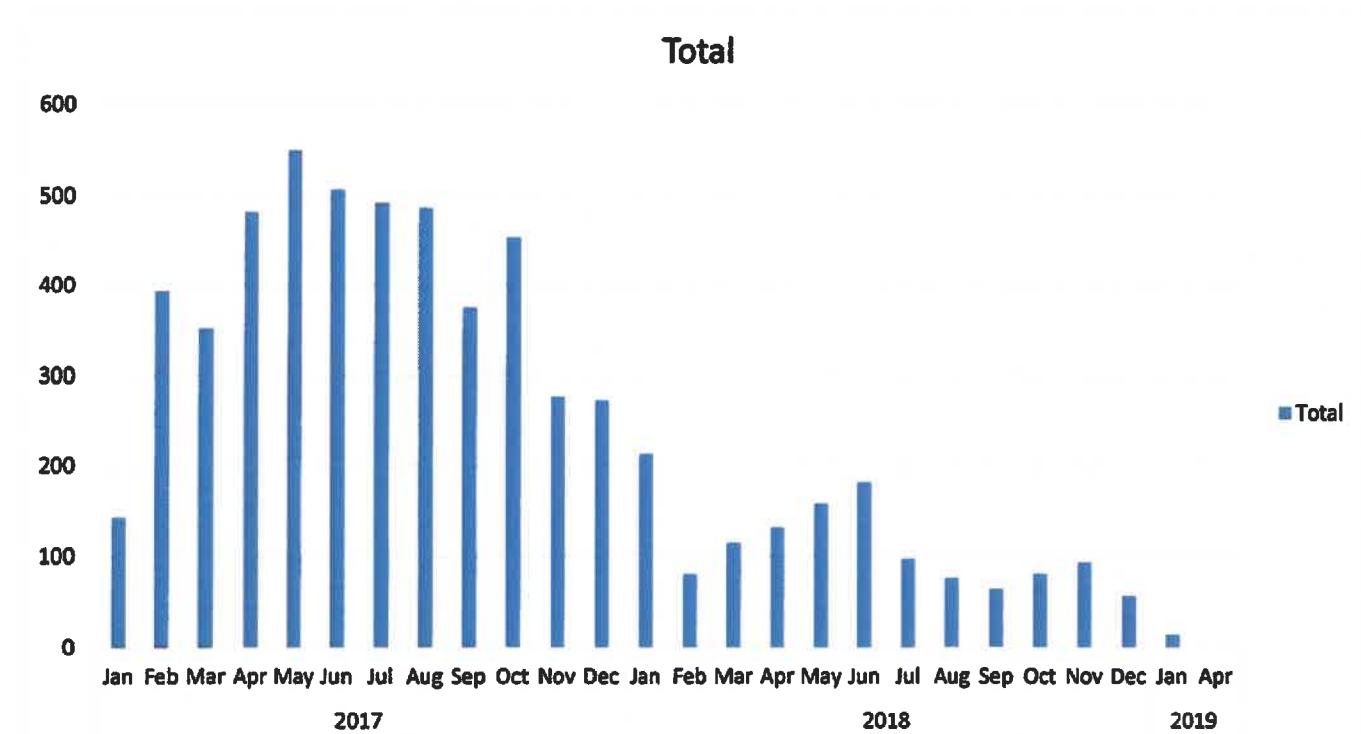
In January 2017, Sheriff Jason Ard, after having been advised of how much the office was spending on fuel, tires and maintenance decided it was time to install GPS devices on all office vehicles that record mileage, harsh driving and speed. The devices are monitored to make sure regular maintenance was being done and to check for harsh driving and excessive speeding. The units were set to alert the Chief Deputy and system administrator when a unit exceeded 90 mph. If an alert is received, dispatch logs and criminal reports are reviewed to see if the violation was justified due to an emergency. Violations not justified are reported to the shift supervisor, to counsel the deputy. Further violations result in a meeting with the division commander and can result in disciplinary action, including suspension or reassignment to a job not requiring operation of an office vehicle.

The Sheriff's office has always had a problem with at fault crashes and poor driving judgement that have resulted in needless injury and costly settlements in suits. The only law enforcement deaths in the history of Livingston Parish where the result of vehicle crashes involving local police departments within the parish. The greatest impact on crash numbers seems to have come from the installation of GPS devices in each unit. At fault crashes in the year before the devices were installed, 2016, numbered 25, which was 54% of all crashes involving Sheriff's units. In 2017, the year the devices were installed, at fault crashes again numbered 25 and were 58% of all crashes. Great improvement was seen in 2018 as at fault crashes were reported at only 12, 36% of all crashes, a 28% reduction in at fault crashes. At fault damage costs dropped 62% from prior to GPS installation to 2018.

Lawsuits filed as a result of at fault crashes from two years before GPS installation to two years after showed a 25% reduction from 24 to 18. Amounts paid out from these lawsuits dropped an amazing 87% during this time.

Since the inception of the GPS monitoring speeding incidents have been reduced from a monthly average in 2017 of 398 speed activations to an average of 112 monthly activations in 2018. The monthly numbers are illustrated in the following graphs.

TREND OF OVER 90 SPEEDING EVENTS



OVER 90 SPEEDING EVENT PER MONTH

2017	4782
Jan	143
Feb	394
Mar	352
Apr	482
May	549
Jun	506
Jul	492
Aug	486
Sep	375
Oct	453
Nov	277
Dec	273
2018	1346
Jan	214
Feb	80
Mar	115
Apr	131
May	158
Jun	182
Jul	97
Aug	76
Sep	64
Oct	80
Nov	93
Dec	56
2019	14
Jan	14
Grand Total	6143

All deputies who operate vehicles are required to attend the NADA pursuit driving class. This class was a great opportunity for deputies to not only learn safe driving techniques, but a chance to practice those techniques in their unit on a real track. The deputies really enjoyed this class and learned a lot, in addition to having fun. Many deputies have commented that the class not only improved their driving skills, but gave them greater confidence behind the wheel. Since then, when deputies have been involved in vehicle pursuits, we discuss the skills and confidence created by the techniques learned in the driving class. The Sheriff and leaders continue to stress the importance of safe driving, the importance of driving safely to each call and the importance of making it home every day in the same condition you left. If a deputy crashes in response to an emergency, we now have two emergencies and our resources are used up. We have also recently displayed officer safety driving posters throughout the courthouse as a reminder of what can happen as the result of poor driving decisions.

We were able to do the driving class by sending some of our training staff to become trainers. They in turn conduct instruction in the skill and conduct training at our location to train our people without having to send them off to other places at significant expense. All you need is a couple of instructors and a location to do the training. This could be accomplished by most medium to large agencies to save money.

Implementation of a GPS monitoring project incurs an initial setup expense with the purchase of hardware and software, but this cost is made up in the reduction of maintenance costs when deputies learn to operate their vehicles in a more responsible manner. If crashes are reduced, repair costs and lawsuits costs are reduced, more than paying for it.

We were able to institute the vacation incentive week with no cost to the office. We have enough deputies assigned to each division to cover when some takes off. It is handled just like any other vacation week though out the year. Time off is managed by supervisors, who in the worst case would have to call in the on call patrol deputy to fill in if necessary.

Overall, these three programs have been instrumental in improving driving and reducing crashes and associated costs. Extra time off is popular among all employees and is easily managed. These programs, especially the vacation incentive could be easily replicated by other agencies. As the Livingston Parish Sheriff's Office has demonstrated, the reduction in crash-related costs and improvement in officer safety and confidence has more than paid for itself.