



**Community First**

**Ty Trenary, Sheriff**

# Destination Zero Award Submission

## Officer Safety – Traffic

### **Executive Summary**

In 2015, the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office agency had 11 on-duty collisions that resulted in major injury for either our employee or a county resident. The cost of these collisions included \$151,171 in medical, legal, and wage/time loss; three totaled patrol cars; and \$2.3 million in litigation costs.

At the end of 2015, agency leadership began working to incorporate the Below 100 tenets and testimonials into employee training and communications, and one of our first priorities was to emphasize traffic and driving safety.

Our efforts have thus far been successful in reducing the number of out-of-policy pursuits and preventable collisions by our personnel. As of October 31, 2016, we had zero on-duty collisions that resulted in major injury and a 32% reduction in collisions from the previous year. Every collision in 2016 has been reviewed for the cause and determination if the incident was preventable (e.g. backing) or non-preventable (being hit in a parking lot by a civilian vehicle).

The number of pursuits decreased by over 38% from the previous year.

## Narrative

The Snohomish County Sheriff's Office employs over 800 personnel in law enforcement and corrections, with 276 commissioned employees. Under the leadership of Sheriff Ty Trenary, the mission of the agency is to provide safe communities through dedicated and professional service and our motto is "Community First".

Located in western Washington State between Puget Sound and the Cascade Mountains, Snohomish County is north of Seattle and south of Vancouver, BC. It is the third largest county in Washington and is home to almost 800,000 county residents.

A Snohomish County deputy sheriff patrols a diverse environment - from urban to rural - and performs a wide variety of jobs - from deterring crime to conducting investigations. Our primary law enforcement services include patrol, investigations, motors, marine, dive, major crimes, K9, property crimes, collision investigation, and search and rescue.

We put over 3 million miles on our agency vehicles every year to serve a county over 2,000 square miles in size. Our employees spend a lot of time on the road in order to meet the needs of our county residents.

In 2015, our agency had 11 on-duty collisions that resulted in major injury for either an employee or a member of the public. The cost of these collisions included \$151,171 in medical, legal, and wage/time loss; three totaled patrol cars; and \$2.3 million in litigation costs. While we can't ignore the dollar cost of these collisions, what was more concerning was the potential risk of critical harm – even death – to our employees and the community we serve.

At the end of 2015, agency leadership began working to incorporate the Below 100 tenets and testimonials into employee training and communications, and one of our first priorities was to emphasize traffic and driving safety. We began to roll out these new initiatives in early 2016:

- In January, we sent all of our supervisors to a presentation by Kim Schlau, the mother of two teenage girls killed in a collision by an Illinois state trooper speeding to a call. That presentation was recorded and has since been included in mandatory roll call training to all 276 of our commissioned employees.
- We created and distributed Below 100 posters (see “Wear Your Seatbelt, Watch Your Speed” and “Complacency Kills”) to all of our precincts, office and contract city locations.
- On February 1, a more restrictive pursuit policy (see “SCSO Vehicle Pursuit Policy 2016”) went into effect. The goal of the new policy was to eliminate out-of-policy pursuits and increase direct supervision and decision-making before a pursuit is initiated. The primary difference between the 2016 policy and previous versions (see “SCSO Vehicle Pursuit Policy 2015”) was the emphasis on safety and accountability, rather than application or initiation. Under the new policy, supervisors assume a greater responsibility in overseeing pursuits initiated by their employees.
- The new policy also called for the creation of a Driving Review Board (DRB) which meets monthly to review all agency pursuits and on-duty collisions. The goal of the DRB and review process is to ensure consistency and uniformity across the agency (including Corrections) in identifying training needs and how supervisors review accidents, collisions, and pursuits. Following the meeting, the Office of Professional Accountability (internal affairs) sergeant produces a Collision Pursuit Review, which is sent to all

commissioned employees. Each review includes collision and pursuit statistics and trends, DRB findings and summaries, and safety tips (see the provided Collision Pursuit Reviews).

- In October, we invited Kim Schlau back to present again, this time to the spouses and families of our commissioned employees.

Our efforts have been successful in reducing the number of out-of-policy pursuits and preventable collisions by our personnel. As of October 31, 2016, we had zero on-duty collisions that resulted in major injury and a 32% reduction in collisions from the previous year. Every collision in 2016 has been reviewed by the DRB for the cause and a determination if the incident was preventable (e.g. backing) or non-preventable (e.g. being hit in a parking lot by a civilian vehicle). The number of initiated pursuits decreased by over 38% from the previous year.

The most significant challenges we face, of course, is changing the mindset and habits of our employees. Cops, by nature, always tend to operate under the philosophy “Get there fast and get there first.” We are asking our employees to now think, “Get there safe and get there alive,” when they sit behind the driver’s seat of their patrol car. Many employees in our agency immediately embraced Below 100 and our new safety initiatives. Others took longer to convince and some are still not ready to accept the changes. It is imperative, however, that as leaders we continue to make the health and welfare of our employees the top priority. We are staying the course.

Several organizations and agencies across the county and state, as well as around the country, have taken note of our unique approach to improving officer safety as it relates to traffic and driving. The National Highway Transportation and Safety Administration (NHTSA has partnered with Below 100 to help provide officer safety training to law enforcement agencies –

the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office was the first agency to receive that training. In addition, NHTSA is monitoring our pursuit and collision statistics and data to research and develop best practices and future training opportunities. We have become the "pilot" agency for NHTSA in the area of officer safety.

We continue to keep the safety of our employees a top priority. In 2017, we are installing telematics into all of our patrol cars. The software installed into our vehicles lets supervisors know when a deputy drives 10 miles over the posted speed limit, when lights are activated, braking and acceleration rates, and even when they fasten their seat belt. Telematics will help us identify unsafe driving behaviors that can be addressed in training, highlight our drivers that have good "scorecards" and even save lives by receiving notification of when airbag deployment in a patrol car and the location of that car, so aid can reach that deputy faster.

We know a job in law enforcement comes with a certain amount of risk. Managing preventable risk is our responsibility and duty to our employees. The initiatives, training, and technology instituted at the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office are helping us change our culture when it comes to safety. We hope some of the lessons we've learned and the best practices we've identified will help other law enforcement agencies in this country implement a similar culture when it comes to traffic and driving safety.

The Snohomish County Sheriff's Office is located in Western Washington State and employs over 800 personnel in law enforcement and corrections, with 276 commissioned employees providing services to more than 800,000 county residents. Our primary law enforcement services are patrol-based, including responding to and investigating crimes, collisions, and critical incidents.

In 2015, our agency had 11 on-duty collisions that resulted in major injury for either our employee or a county resident. The cost of these collisions included \$151,171 in medical, legal, and wage/time loss; three totaled patrol cars; and \$2.3 million in litigation costs. While we can't ignore the dollar cost of these collisions, what was more concerning was the potential risk of harm – even death – to our employees and the community we serve.

At the end of 2015, agency leadership began working to incorporate the Below 100 tenets and testimonials into employee training and communications, and one of our first priorities was to emphasize traffic and driving safety. We began to roll out these new initiatives in early 2016:

- On January 12, we sent all of our supervisors to a presentation by Kim Schlau, the mother of two girls killed in a collision by an Illinois state trooper. That presentation was recorded and has since been included in mandatory roll call training.
- On February 1, we implemented a more restrictive pursuit policy. The goal of the new policy was to eliminate out-of-policy pursuits and increase direct supervision and decision-making before a pursuit is initiated.
- The new policy called for the creation of a Driving Review Board (DRB) which meets monthly to review all agency pursuits and on-duty collisions. The goal of the DRB and review process is to ensure consistency and uniformity across the agency in identifying training needs and how supervisors review accidents, collisions, and pursuits (including Corrections). The first DRB meeting was held on February 10.

Our efforts have thus far been successful in reducing the number of out-of-policy pursuits and preventable collisions by our personnel. As of October 31, 2016, we had zero on-duty collisions that resulted in major injury and a 32% reduction in collisions from the previous year. Every collision in 2016 has been reviewed for the cause and determination if the incident was preventable (e.g. backing) or non-preventable (being hit in a parking lot by a civilian vehicle). The number of pursuits decreased by over 38% from the previous year.

Our work in the area of traffic and driving safety for employees has been noted by several organizations and agencies across the county and state, as well as around the country, including the National Highway Transportation and Safety Administration (NHTSA). NHTSA has partnered with Below 100 to help provide officer safety training to law enforcement agencies – the Snohomish County Sheriff's Office was the first agency to receive that training. In addition, NHTSA is monitoring our pursuit and collision statistics and data to research and develop best practices and future training opportunities. We have become the "pilot" agency for NHTSA in the area of officer safety.