

Herndon (VA) Police Department 2023 Comprehensive Officer Safety Summary

The Town of Herndon is the third largest incorporated town in Virginia, comprised of 4.25 square miles. It is situated in western Fairfax County, just minutes from Dulles International Airport and approximately 25 miles from Washington, DC. The town has 11 parks. HPD is nationally accredited through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies. Under the leadership of Chief Maggie Deboard are 54 police officers and 18 civilian personnel.

OFFICER SAFETY

All officers are issued custom fitted level III soft body armor and required to wear them on duty and while at the range. The vests were paid for by the DOJ Bulletproof Vest Partnership and replaced every five years as recommended by the manufacturer. The department also offers officers the option of wearing their vests inside an outer carrier, which is part of the uniform. Sewn onto the outer vest carrier is a hidden flap under which a handle is located so the officer can be pulled to safety. Officers also have access to lighted ballistic shields and helmets which are carried in the supervisor's vehicle.

Officers are issued Glock 9mm handguns with mounted tactical lights. Officers are also provided with patrol rifles and must qualify with them quarterly. The department used to allow officers to carry their personal rifles but discontinued this practice and standardized all rifles so any officer picking up a rifle would be familiar with its operation and capabilities. Officers are also encouraged to carry back-up handguns and must qualify with them. Officers are also issued Tasers, pepper spray and collapsible batons. Officers participate in the department's handcuffing and use of force training. In 2022, there were four use of force incidents involving weapons and 13 incidents of weaponless physical force and all incidents were within department policy.

The Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services mandates that all peace officers qualify with their firearms once per year and must receive a passing score of 70% or higher. Herndon PD requires their officers to complete two range trainings per year and requires its officer to achieve a score of 75% or higher. In addition to weapons qualifications, officers are trained in live fire tactical shooting training which includes low light shooting, shooting while moving, shooting from behind cover/concealment, shooting from behind a shield, shooting with another officer and use of force decision making.

Two years ago, the department removed less-lethal shotguns from service, to eliminate the opportunity to mistakenly load them with live rounds, and replaced them with 40mm less lethal launchers capable of discharging foam baton rounds. After more discussion and analysis, the shotguns were returned to service with less lethal bean bag rounds and replaced all the outer stocks with orange stocks to identify them as LL. All patrol officers now carry these in their vehicles. In 2021 the 40mm LL launcher was used to successfully to subdue a subject in emotional crisis who was armed with a knife.

HPD has been using body worn and in-car cameras for four and a half years and was one of the first agencies in Northern Virginia to have body worn cameras (BWCs). The officer's BWC has a built in GPS so the officer can be located even when out of dash cam view. Video footage in use of force incidents are reviewed by the commander. When/if appropriate, the video footage of both cameras are played in briefings and trainings, not to criticize the officer using the camera, but to educate other officers of what went right. The department had an officer involved shooting in 2019 and again in 2022. Video and audio of these incidents were put into a PowerPoint training debriefing and presented it to all department members.

All officers are also issued high-visibility vests and they are required to wear them when out of their patrol cars for longer periods of time to reduce the opportunities for their officers being struck by other vehicles.

In 2022, the department purchased and trained all officers in the use of spit masks to prevent subjects in custody from transferring bodily fluids to its officers.

60% of HPD's officers have been trained in Crisis Intervention Training and continues to send officers to training as it becomes available.

The department also has two thermal imaging cameras to search for subjects hidden by darkness. This provides a greater level of safety than officers searching for dangerous subjects in the dark. HPD also recently purchased FLIR thermal imaging monocular devices.

All officers are issued tactical trauma kits referred to as "Go bags". Inside these kits are tourniquets, Quick Clot, sucking chest wound patches, bandages, Narcan and an airway tube. All officers, including executive staff, are trained by the fire department in the use of every item in the trauma kit. These bags also include additional pistol and rifle magazines. Each patrol car also contains a smaller first aid kit inside the vehicle attached to the headrest for immediate deployment. The kits that were issued prior to this upgrade were given to officers for their personal vehicles.

HPD conducts biennial active shooter training independently and with local police agencies and fire departments. During this training, officers must also utilize their trauma bags to provide aid to simulated shooting victims as well as themselves. These exercises have been conducted at the community center and town staff have been trained to react and retreat during an active shooter situation. Officers also have key card access for entry into any town building at any time, as well as high resolution maps of these buildings pre-loaded into the officers' mobile computers as well as printed maps being available in the sergeant's command vehicle.

HPD has 25 specially trained crisis intervention team (CIT) officers who are available to respond to crisis situations involving mental illness or developmental disability. Officers also receive de-escalation training. As a result of the department's efforts, use of force incidents have been reduced from 21 in 2018 to 12 in 2020 and all but four incidents in 2021 involved hands on use of force only.

Officers are also issued Narcan, which was obtained through a grant. The department has two officers trained as Narcan instructors. In 2022, HPD was responsible for saving two lives via the use of Narcan.

OFFICER TRAFFIC SAFETY

The department sent two sworn members to the Below 100 training in 2018, which is a common sense training program on safety areas under an officer's control, with particular focus on such elements as seatbelts, vests, driving tactics and proper procedures. The officers then returned and conducted training for the entire department. The two officers used the Below 100 template for the training, but also incorporated HPD's own relevant traffic policies into the instruction.

Sworn officers attend two weeks of Emergency Vehicle Operations (EVOC) training when they go through the academy. After graduation, officers are required to attend live EVOC training every three years. Training is conducted at the academy track and officers drive the same vehicles they operate on duty. EVOC training involves high speed driving and decision making, pursuit operations and policy review, cone courses and accident avoidance, and inclement weather driving on a specialized skid pan to simulate icy roadway conditions. HPD has several trained instructors who assist academy staff in conducting EVOC training for the department. These instructors also assist academy staff several times a year when conducting EVOC training for new recruits. This allows the department's part-time EVOC instructors to hone their teaching and driving skills in this area. One of their EVOC instructors is also tasked with providing classroom-based pursuit training annually for all sworn department members. This training covers department policy, liability and relevant case law. Videos of police pursuits located online are often used to illustrate the dangers involved in pursuit and response driving.

All police vehicles are equipped with an automatic vehicle locator (AVL) that provides real-time location and tracking management. This helps dispatchers to effectively deploy officers to calls, maximize efficiency and time, and provides a critical safety feature to assist in quickly locating an officer's vehicle when they are not responding to the radio. The Axon body worn camera system currently being implemented in the department will provide an additional GPS tracking device to assist in quickly locating an officer on foot and away from their vehicle.

The department currently utilizes the Axon in-car camera system, with built in license plate readers (LPR). In addition to the forward-facing front camera, HPD's vehicles are equipped with rear-facing cameras and back-seat cameras so officers can safely watch suspects during transport. In-car cameras automatically initiate when an officer turns on their emergency lights to ensure driving behaviors and citizen encounters are captured on video.

The department also has dash cameras in each of the department's cruisers are set to automatically turn on when the vehicle reaches 80 mph. The main purpose of this feature is to ensure pursuits or high-speed emergency response driving is captured on both the violator and the officer. Automatic recording of vehicles traveling at high speeds also serves as an accountability measure. Although these activations are not automatically sent to supervisors, the video is subject to being randomly selected for audit. Video audits of both in-car and BWCs must be conducted monthly by all squad supervisors. If policy violations are discovered, supervisors have the option of handling them formally or informally, depending on the nature of the violation, severity of the incident and past performance of the officer.

All vehicle accidents are required to be formally investigated through the internal affairs process. Over the past 5 years, from 2018-2022, officers have been involved in a total of only 19 at fault vehicle accidents. None of the 18 at-fault accidents were the result of excessive speed and most of these accidents involved low speeds in parking lots or while slowing or stopped on the roadway. All vehicle accidents are required to be investigated through the internal affairs process. The department has several officers trained in traffic accident reconstruction. These officers investigate accidents resulting in serious injuries or fatalities, as well as serious cruiser accidents.

Personnel are required to always wear seat belts while on duty. This applies to both town-owned vehicles and to rental cars being operated by department personnel. Signs were installed on both exit gates to the department's secured parking lot to remind officers to always buckle up and be cognizant of their speed. Officers are also required by policy to wear their yellow, high-visibility traffic vests when working traffic assignments or while working accident scenes on the roadways. Training on the pursuit policy is conducted annually and documented. Training consists of policy review, case law discussion, liability and/or review of video incidents of pursuits that are available for discussion and training.

All pursuits are formally investigated and documented through the department's internal affairs process. When policy violations occur, officers receive discipline in accordance with the seriousness of the violation and past performance. Remedial training is mandated in cases where it is warranted. The department's pursuit policy was changed a few years ago to narrow the circumstances when a pursuit can be initiated, limiting pursuits to incidents involving crimes of violence or of an immediate threat to public safety. This has resulted in a significant reduction of pursuits over the past three years from 3 in 2018 to only 1 total between the years of 2019-2021.

To reduce the chances of officers being struck, stop sticks were recently removed from all department vehicles and eliminated as an authorized tool to stop fleeing vehicles due to the danger posed to the officer deploying them. Roadblocks and pit maneuvers are still permitted as tactics to stop fleeing vehicles if the officer has attended the specific EVOC training courses for these tactics and maintained proficiency through retraining.

Recently, a drone was obtained on grant funding that will allow accident reconstruction to be done from the air, eliminating the need to close roadways or place officers in the roadway to conduct accident scene mapping/reconstruction and photo documentation. This program will be initiated, and training conducted for ARU investigators, once department policy on the drone program is finalized.

OFFICER WELLNESS

The Herndon Police Department became the law enforcement liaison for a critical public safety mental health survey that was conducted in 2021 and led by the U.S. Marshal's Service and was developed to collect mental health data tailored towards first responder mental health (law enforcement, fire and rescue, corrections, and dispatchers), to assess levels of PTSD, anxiety, and depression among participants. The HPD received an agency summary quickly due to their lead role in the project. The survey results were in line with national and state results that showed a significant number of officers were experiencing moderate to severe levels of anxiety and depression. Also alarming from the survey results was a snapshot of those with levels of PTSD and suicide ideation. HPD has implemented several wellness programs since.

The HPD has developed a comprehensive wellness program for department members that has greatly improved the mental health and wellness of their personnel, and improved safety and working conditions. The goal of this program is not just to react to wellness issues as they arise, but to proactively provide the programs, resources, and tools necessary to prevent physical and mental issues from becoming personally disabling or interfering with law enforcement performance and responsibilities.

Police psychologist services were contracted to assist Herndon officers and dispatchers who were struggling with exposure to traumatic events, as well as the daily stresses of the job. Having a known contract psychologist who is available for call out during critical incidents proved invaluable last year when officers responded to an apartment complex for a welfare check of a family, only to discover the murdered bodies of two young children and their mother. The psychologist, who had her own emotional support dog along with her, met with every officer and dispatcher involved in the incident prior to the end of their shift and upon leaving the station. The psychologist also provided follow up sessions with those who needed it.

The department has also added its own dedicated facility dog to the HPD family to assist our personnel with daily stress and trauma exposure. A non-profit organization based out of Portsmouth, VA, (Mutts With a Mission), who trained and placed dogs with veterans suffering from PTSD began to place some of their dogs with law enforcement agencies as facility dogs, where they could serve an entire group of first responders as opposed to one individual with PTSD. In April of 2020, Canine Bragg joined the HPD family and had an immediate positive impact on personnel. Bragg and his handler have also visited some of our local schools for various special events, which has helped break down barriers between the police and our community.

Annual wellness educational sessions are mandated for both sworn and professional staff, as well as command staff, as part of HPD's wellness program. Mandating these sessions through policy removes the stigma of having to talk with a mental health professional. These sessions were conducted virtually with the police psychologists and done in complete confidence. Follow up sessions were conducted with personnel as needed or as requested.

HPD has a total of seven officers trained in peer support. A retired police officer is also trained, as is one assistant supervisor in the dispatch center. Peer supporters are used to respond to the scenes of critical incidents. When incidents exceed the ability of HPD, peer teams from other jurisdictions in the region are called to assist our department. In 2022, the department also formed a partnership with the Herndon United Methodist Church and started a formal police chaplain program with two of their pastors. The pastors have come to roll calls and introduced themselves to the officers and have begun to conduct ride-alongs to learn more about the department and the officers. They will be used to assist our officers with difficult incidents in the community, as well as be another resource for officers who wish to talk privately about difficulties they may be having. The department recognizes that poor performance and behavior often has a root cause that can be addressed successfully if discovered early. As a result, the department has established an Early Warning System to identify officers in need of structured intervention measures to address problematic behavior or other potential issues. The objective of an Early Warning System review is to recognize incidents, practices, or patterns of behavior that negatively impact the department's mission or the officer's performance, and provide structured intervention through monitoring, training, counseling, or other productive means to improve performance.

HPD has also developed Critical Incident Reporting System by which personnel and supervisors are asked to document their on duty exposures to traumatic incidents after they encounter them. Incidents include traumatic incidents such as child deaths, officer involved shootings, etc. to document the officer's or dispatcher's involvement to help support future workers comp claims of PTSD, depression or anxiety. These forms do not go up the chain of command or to HR, but rather they are kept in a file in the administrative lieutenant's office. This file is given to the officer upon his/her separation from the department.

A Restoration and Recovery Room, or "nap" room was established in HPD to provide officers and dispatchers a safe place to take a 20-30-minute power nap, meditate, or otherwise use as a quiet space to decompress. Officers and dispatchers work long, varied shifts and are routinely working in states of sleep deprivation. Recliners, dim lighting, dark paint, and a sound machine contribute to a soothing environment. Before this room was created, officers would routinely catch short naps in their cruisers when sleep deprived or while waiting to go to court or drive home after an extended shift. This nap room creates a safe place for officers to take a short nap without judgment. The room is also used for meditation by staff and can be utilized as a private space for female employees to lactate after the birth of a child.

The department has also established contacts with the David Lynch foundation who donated instructors to teach transcendental meditation to its officers.

HPD has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) which offers counseling and support services for personnel at no cost. The EAP can assist with a variety of problems whether personal or job-related. Any employee or family member may initiate a request for help by calling EAP without going through the chain of command and the services provided are strictly confidential. Supervisors also can make employee referrals to EAP when they determine someone needs services. If a work performance problem continues and the employee does not voluntarily consult with EAP, the supervisor can initiate a formal referral for the employee. The department also provides suicide prevention training to their staff.

Department personnel have 24-hour access to a well-equipped gymnasium that contains functional fitness, strength, and cardio equipment and personnel are provided one hour to work out on duty each shift. The Town of Herndon also has its own Community Center with an indoor pool, gymnasium, strength and cardioequipment, tennis courts, and fitness classes. All personnel have free access to this facility and the classes that are offered, on or off duty. In addition, the Town's golf course is free to all employees.

Starting January 2023, the department instituted a mandatory fitness program for all sworn officers that involves three components: monthly to bi-monthly squad workouts, annual fitness assessment, and annual wellness education. The purpose of this program is to promote morale and personal well-being by promoting individual health and fitness, strengthen officers' ability to respond to increasing physical demands of the law enforcement profession, and increase resilience and the ability to manage emotional and physical stress, enhance mental alertness, and reduce tension. The program is optional for all non-sworn staff.

Medical physicals are mandated every 1, 2, or 3 years through the Public Safety Occupational Health Center (OHC), depending on the age of the officer. The physical examination for sworn personnel is conducted only to determine the employee's continued fitness to perform the tasks of a police officer and to inform them of their general physical condition. In addition to regular medical tests, exams, and blood work provided by the OHC, officers are also given stress tests, vaccines, and chest x-rays at various stages in their career. Officers are encouraged to drop in at the OHC to have blood drawn a week before their scheduled physical so the doctor can go over the results with them at the time of their medical exam.

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COVID vaccines and flu shots are made available through advertised locations in the County or are provided free of charge through Town insurance at local pharmacies within our jurisdiction.

The Town offers access to financial planning resources to all personnel for their Town 457 plans. Employees can work with the Town's Investment Advisor or use the online Web Education Portal to get assistance.

Last year this agency submitted in the award categories of Comprehensive Safety, Officer Wellness, Officer Safety and Officer Traffic Safety and was a finalist in Comprehensive, Wellness and Officer Traffic Safety. The agency has made some improvements to all of their programs and is submitting in each category again this year.

**** This summary is only a brief overview of many of the agency's programs. In the actual submission you will see that the agency has other programs and incentives to benefit its members. Please review their entire submission and its associated documents to gain a complete understanding of their program.**