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COVID-19 Field Feature

Historic Pact Between Neighboring Agencies Offers Aid During Global Pandemic

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CRI-TAC COVID-19 Field Features are a compilation of innovative practices implemented by the field to enhance operations while maintaining public safety and the safety and wellness of an agency during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Historic Pact Between Neighboring Agencies Offers Aid During Global Pandemic

Article by Chief Thomas Weitzel

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the critical importance of collaboration across agencies. As the chief of Riverside (Illinois) Police Department, I wanted to incorporate protocols for our small community to dispatch our police officers to assist other jurisdictions, and receive assistance, when needed during this unprecedented time.

The original idea for a mutual aid pact between the Illinois villages of Riverside, McCook, Brookfield, and North Riverside was sparked by the fact that these communities already participate in a consolidated dispatch center—West Central Consolidated Communications (WC3). Since a common infrastructure was already in place, it made sense to leverage that arrangement for additional benefits. Under the proposed mutual aid pact, WC3 would pick from the officers on call to respond to any of the communities within the consolidated dispatch center and assist each other with *all* calls for police service—not just those occurring within the geographic boundaries of discrete jurisdictions.

Historically, when assisting other agencies, officers would only respond to the agency's immediate request and then move on to the next call. I wanted an agreement in which an officer would be able to handle an entire case due for a neighboring agency inundated with COVID-19 exposures, infections (or positive testing), or large-scale civil unrest.

How the Agreement Works

The goal of the project was to have a large group of officers available to respond to and handle calls in any of the four participating jurisdictions—not just the agency for which they were working.

Typically, officers only handle calls in their own communities, but in this mutual aid pact, they all work together as one, so that each municipality can assure its residents that if they call the police during this pandemic or civil unrest, the police will respond as normal.

Imagine a situation in which the Brookfield police force was overwhelmed by officers having either COVID-19 exposures or infections. Riverside police officers, when available on the line-up sheet, would then be dispatched to Brookfield to handle all calls for service, make arrests, and follow through with the case reports—going above and beyond the typical expectation of mere “assistance.”

Creation and Implementation

To get this project up and running, we established a consensus among the police chiefs of each village that this was a good idea. Then, we consulted with our city and village managers and received their acceptance and approval, which, ultimately, led to the approval from our elected officials. The biggest challenge during the project was getting officer buy-in. Initially, officers were unsure if they had authority in other jurisdictions to handle an entire criminal case. However, once that hurdle was cleared, officers supported the program.

The results were immediate. During the civil unrest in the metro Chicago area in the late summer and fall of 2020, which encompassed every town included in the WC3 dispatch center, we immediately used the mutual aid pact to assist each other. If we had not had this mutual aid agreement, it would have been impossible for local law enforcement agencies to handle these situations of large-scale civil unrest, rioting, and looting on their own.

Now that this mutual agreement is in place, it would not be outside the parameters to think that someday this type of agreement, and the foundation that it develops, could be used to consider the benefits of other types of shared services. This was not the intention of the agreement, but other services such as crisis intervention teams and SWAT should be evaluated to see whether the efficiencies of shared services would better serve communities.

When my officers asked me about this agreement, I told them that, within the participating towns, it was a “no boundaries” agreement—“no boundaries,” meaning that no tasks were off limits. We responded to everything from routine calls in each other’s villages to criminal cases and prosecutions, all the way through the end of the case. We did not want an agreement that was just a temporary aid to other agencies, where officers would leave town once the assistance was completed.

This agreement would not have happened without the support of everyone involved. The most important aspect of this agreement was achieving buy-in from the officers, village managers, and elected officials.

“Each police chief among the neighboring participating villages was fully supportive of this agreement and played a major role in getting it off the ground.”

Agencies looking to follow this model should contact Chief Tom Weitzel at tweitzel@riverside.il.us to request additional details or a copy of the mutual aid agreement. Additionally, you can hear Chief Weitzel share details of this initiative in the CRI-TAC webinar [Pandemic in the Prairies](#).

Police Chiefs and participating agencies in the agreement included Riverside, IL, Chief Thomas Weitzel; Brookfield, IL, Police Chief Edward Petrak; McCook, IL, Police Chief Mario DePasquale; North Riverside, IL, Police Chief Carlos Garcia; and West Central Consolidated Communication Executive Director Jason Rodgers.

Does your agency have innovative and unique practices put in place due to COVID-19 that you would like to see highlighted?

Email us at CRITAC@theiacp.org.

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