



2014 in review: Annual crime statistics and complaint data

Two years ago, the Menlo Park community was facing rising gang crime and shootings in the Belle Haven neighborhood. At that time, the City made a commitment to change.

At a community meeting in late 2012, members of the police department, local officials, and residents committed to making the City a safer place for everyone to live, work and play.

In 2014, the police department responded to over 20,000 calls for service, conducted over 11,000 traffic stops, wrote more than 4,000 reports, and arrested nearly 1,500 individuals. The resulting 2014 crime statistics showed an 11% decrease and the fewest Part 1 crimes, consisting of homicide, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, and arson, since 1999! This annual crime report is available online.

The goal of a safer city continues to be achieved through collaboration as a cohesive police department, working with our partners in the community, including our proactive Menlo Park residents and businesses.

In addition, last year and for the first time, we committed to providing transparency by reporting the outcome of complaints filed against our personnel in 2013. We will continue to report these numbers annually. The police department is a statewide leader and continues to be at the forefront of technology as one of the first San Mateo County police agencies to wear body cameras. The department issued body cameras to all police officers and sergeants in 2014 in hopes of strengthening officer's performance and accountability, enhancing the department's transparency, documenting encounters with the public, and investigating and resolving complaints and officer involved incidents.

In 2014, the Menlo Park Police Department received 31 citizen complaints out of 40,065 officer contacts. In 2013, 30 citizen complaints were received. When reviewing personnel complaints, it is important to look at the number and types of calls for service law enforcement officers respond to within the evaluated time period.

It is inevitable that with 40,065 public contacts, there will be situations where a member of the public is not satisfied with and has justification to file a complaint based on the service received. The number one complaint filed was for discourtesy or rude behavior displayed by an officer (16 complaints). Out of the 31 citizen complaints filed, two (2) were sustained (6.5%), 16 were exonerated (51.6%), five (5) are still currently under investigation or pending (16.1%), and one (1) was unfounded (3.2%). Additionally, 22.6% of the complaints were withdrawn (by the person who filed the complaint) before the investigation was completed.

The use of body cameras has allowed supervisors immediate access to view incidents mentioned by complainants. The review of these recordings upon receipt a complaint allows for an examination of a situation as it happened based upon the facts, as opposed to recollection.

A sustained finding of a complaint means that an internal investigation was conducted and the evidence indicated that the complaint was founded. The two founded complaints were for conduct unbecoming. For a complaint to be exonerated there must be proof that the officer's actions were consistent with department policies and protocols, and this occurs quite frequently since we require our officers to wear audio and video recorders. For a complaint to be determined unfounded it must be demonstrated that the alleged actions did not occur or did not involve our personnel.

Law enforcement officers come into contact with the public in several ways, including response to calls received by the public safety dispatch center, flag downs or requests by a citizen in public, and officer initiated activities (which range from traffic to pedestrian stops). Not all calls for service result in reports taken or the issuance of citations. Officers use discretion, experience, knowledge of laws/policies, and their communication skills to resolve situations.

The calls for service do not reflect the frequent number of walk-ins to the police lobby front counter and phone calls where professional staff ranging from records and parking to the administration provide services to the public (i.e. police report copies, vehicle releases, parking enforcement/permits, media inquiries, property/evidence, etc.). Out of these thousands of interactions, no complaints were filed.

With all this factored into the equation, 31 complaints per year is an acceptable number, but we will always strive toward lowering this number to zero.