



2015 in review: Annual crime statistics and complaint data

For the third year in a row, the Menlo Park Police Department released its annual crime statistics and citizen complaint data. This annual crime report is available online.

In 2015, the police department responded to over 21,000 calls for service, conducted over 10,400 traffic stops, wrote more than 4,000 reports and arrested nearly 1,400 individuals. The resulting 2015 crime statistics showed a 39 percent decrease in violent crimes from 2014, which consists of homicide, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. Please note that 2015 showed the lowest number of violent crimes since the compilation of these annual statistics began. Property crimes rose slightly (5 percent), which involves burglary larceny, auto theft and arson.

The police department strives toward the goal of a safer city through continued collaboration as a cohesive department and working with our community partners, including our proactive Menlo Park residents and businesses. In 2013, the Police Chief committed to transparency by annually reporting the outcome of complaints filed against our personnel. The Menlo Park Police Department was one of the first San Mateo County police agencies to wear body cameras. It issued these to all police officers and sergeants in 2014 in an effort to strengthen officers' performance and accountability, enhance department transparency, document encounters with the public, and investigate and resolve complaints and officer-involved incidents.

In 2015, the Menlo Park Police Department received 24 citizen complaints out of 39,771 officer contacts. In 2014, 31 citizen complaints were received. When reviewing personnel complaints, it is important to look at the number and types of service calls officers respond to within the evaluated period. It is inevitable that with 39,771 public contacts, there will be situations where a member of the public is not satisfied with the service received and has justification to file a complaint. The number one complaint filed was for conduct unbecoming by an officer (12 complaints). Out of the 24 citizen complaints filed:

- Two were sustained (8.3%),
- Two were not sustained (8.3%)
- Seven were exonerated (29.2%),
- Two are still currently under investigation or pending (8.3%),
- Seven concluded with no finding; the complainant did not provide necessary information to continue the investigation (29.2%),
- One was unfounded (4%), and
- Three were withdrawn (12.5%) by the complainant before the investigation was completed.

The use of body cameras has allowed supervisors to review incidents mentioned by complainants immediately. This review allows for an examination of a situation as it happened based upon the facts, as opposed to recollection.

A sustained finding means that evidence from the internal investigation indicated the complaint was founded. The two founded complaints in 2015 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. This occurs quite frequently since all officers now 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 contact the public in several ways, including response to calls received by the dispatch center, flag downs or requests made in public, and officer initiated activities (which range from traffic to pedestrian stops). Not all service calls result in written reports or citations. Officers use their discretion, experience, knowledge of laws/policies and communication skills to resolve situations.

The calls for service do not reflect the frequent number of walk-ins to the police lobby and phone calls where professional staff, including administration, records and parking, provides services directly (i.e., police report copies, vehicle releases, parking enforcement/permits, media inquiries, property/evidence, etc.)

With all this factored into the equation, 24 complaints per year is an acceptable number, but we will always strive toward zero.