



2017 in review: Annual crime statistics and complaint data

The Police Department continues to work with our community partners, residents and businesses toward the goal of a safer city. This is the fifth year that the Menlo Park Police Department is releasing its annual crime statistics and citizen complaint data. In addition, crime statistics are made available on our website and the Police Department's "open data" portal.

Menlo Park police 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.

All Menlo Park police employees working in the community have been wearing body cameras since 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 2017, the Police Department responded to over 22,000 calls for service, conducted over 9,000 traffic stops, wrote more than 4,000 reports and arrested nearly 1,300 individuals. 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.). These workload indicators have increased since 2016.

The 2017 crime statistics show an increase in reported violent crime (homicide, rape, robbery and aggravated assault); 54 incidents in 2017 over 30 reported in 2016. This increase can be partially attributed to multiple crime events committed by one suspect. An example of this is the three armed robberies at local drugstores over a three day period in late October committed by the same suspect. Additionally, there were multiple incidents that took place prior to 2017 that were reported to the Police Department in the 2017 calendar year. Property crimes (burglary, larceny, auto theft and arson) rose four percent in comparison to 2016. Clearance rates for violent crimes (the percentage of crimes that are solved) also increased from 66% in 2016 to 72% in 2017.

Menlo Park Police Department received 26 public complaints out of 40,239 officer contacts. 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 40,239 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 in 2017 was for discourtesy (8 complaints). Out of the 26 citizen complaints filed:

- Two were sustained,
- One was exonerated,

- Four are pending,
- Two concluded with no finding,
- Ten were unfounded,
- Six were frivolous, and
- One was withdrawn.

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 sustained complaints in 2017 were for procedural violations.

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.

A complaint is closed with no finding when the complainant fails to disclose promised information needed to further the investigation, the complainant is no longer available, or the department member is no longer employed by the department.

For a complaint to be determined unfounded, it must be demonstrated that the alleged actions did not occur or did not involve our personnel.

A finding of frivolous is reached when, the investigation found that the complaint is one that is "totally and completely without merit" or is taken "for the sole purpose of harassing the officer".

Finally, a finding of withdrawn is reached when the complainant affirmatively indicated the desire to withdraw the complaint.

With all this factored into the equation, 26 complaints per year is an acceptable number, but we will always strive toward zero.