

FORT BRAGG SUBSTATION AND HOLDING CELLS

A Report on the Mendocino County Sheriff's Fort Bragg Substation

May 13, 2009

Summary

The Grand Jury visited the Mendocino County Sheriff's Substation in Fort Bragg and found it to be well-staffed and well-managed. Despite repeated requests for an efficient bar coding system, the evidence room staff must still document and track evidence manually. This contributes to an abundance of backlogged material evidence awaiting clearance and proper disposal.

Background

California Penal Code states ...*The Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county* [§ 919(b)] and ...*The Grand Jury shall investigate and report on the operations, accounts and records of the officers, departments or functions of the county* [§ 925]. On February 19, 2009, the Grand Jury undertook this charge by touring the Fort Bragg Substation, including the holding cells and evidence room.

Methods

The Grand Jury toured the facility, including the evidence room and the holding cells. The vehicles were inspected and the personnel interviewed on site.

Findings

1. The Fort Bragg Substation is staffed by one lieutenant, one secretary who doubles as the evidence room tech, two sergeants and eight deputies (one is a trainee). The patrol area for the Fort Bragg office is the Navarro River Bridge to the north county line. The substation is also responsible for the south coast area which runs from the Navarro River Bridge to the south county line. South coast is staffed by one resident sergeant and one deputy.
2. There is a large screen telecommunications system where an early morning briefing is held each day with connections between the Sheriff's office in Ukiah and the Willits Substation.
3. There are two holding cells at the Fort Bragg Substation. The inmate(s) are observed every 15 minutes.
4. The policy of the Sheriff's office is to hold inmates for no longer than two hours and then transport them to Ukiah.
5. A deputy from the Fort Bragg Substation transports prisoners as far as the Willits Substation where they are picked up by an inland deputy to complete the trip to Ukiah.
6. Prisoners are brought from Ukiah for court in Fort Bragg and are kept in the substation's holding cells.

7. There is one bilingual officer who receives additional pay for his language skills.
8. All deputies are POST certified (Peace Officer Standards and Training). They attend a POST academy for six months training. The local academies are located in Santa Rosa, Chico and Eureka. The training is normally paid for by the individual but the department can sponsor someone as well. The cost of training is approximately \$6,000.
9. All of the officers carry tasers. Two were trained at a "Train the Trainer" taser school and then trained the others.
10. Tasers are worn on the opposite side from the handgun to prevent accidental shootings.
11. New officers are on probation for one year.
12. The Sub-Station currently has no K-9 unit for officer protection and drug "sniffing." It had one in the past and officers would like to reinstate it.
13. Only the south coast officers take their cars home when off duty.
14. Each patrol car at the Fort Bragg Substation is shared by two officers who are responsible for keeping it washed and clean.
15. The patrol cars have cameras but no computers. The camera data are downloaded to disc at the end of the shift.
16. There is a ride-along policy allowing civilians to ride with patrol officers.
17. The State Corrections Standards Authority visits the substation, without notice, on a biennial basis. Other inspections of the substation are done by the Fire Marshall and OSHA.
18. The County Sheriff's Office in Ukiah handles all dispatch.
19. The deputies on the north coast work ten hour shifts with no overlap. There is no coverage for a four-hour period. The south coast coverage varies; however, there is always someone on call.
20. The evidence room has no computerized system for tracking evidence. A card system is still in use. For approximately 17 years the substation has requested a bar coding system. The Grand Jury noticed an abundance of backlogged material evidence awaiting clearance and proper disposal.
21. Confiscated firearms are destroyed in an Oakland foundry. Drugs and other hazardous materials are taken to a multi-agency purging area in San Francisco.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that the Mendocino County Sheriff's Office:

1. seek funding for a canine unit for the Fort Bragg Substation. (Finding 12)
2. implement a bar-coding system for evidence record keeping. (Finding 20)

Discussion

Jurors found the staff to be very helpful, cooperative and informative. The evidence clerk is very busy and does not have sufficient time to purge the evidence.

Required Responses

Mendocino County Sheriff (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Board of Supervisors (All Findings; All Recommendations)

Mendocino County Chief Executive Officer (All Findings; All Recommendations)