*POLICE RECORDS ACCURACY AND EFFICIENCY: The Benefit of Using Outside Resources*
Ed Claughton

When police departments produce crime statistics which are inaccurate, whether through UCR or in-house reports, the impact can be felt on various levels (that is if the inaccuracy is discovered). Questions may come from the public, challenges can arise when seeking grant funding (often based in part on local crime statistics), and the criminal investigations unit can be second guessed on how cases are being cleared. Usually the Records section is scrutinized first since it is the entity which manages criminal data. The long term effect of inaccurate statistics can be devastating, particularly when they go undiscovered for long periods of time. Learning years after the fact that crime was either much higher or lower than previously reported may lead a department to reevaluate and significantly change how resources are being deployed but first, it must find why such a disparity occurred.

## Empowering Records Employees

Finding the cause of problematic crime statistics can be very difficult since errors can occur during the creation, processing, or maintenance phase of police reports. The task of sorting through vast amounts of data as well as report processing performance and procedures can be overwhelming. Errors can occur from the moment a report is written. Officers can make mistakes which result in the improper classification of reports and when this occurs because of a lack of training, non-existent reporting manuals, or improper policy, the problem becomes a systemic issue that is compounded over time. Problems can also occur during the time that reports are reviewed and processed. All reports should go through two levels of thorough review- once with the sergeant, and then by records personnel. If the reviewing sergeant misses a mistake it is incumbent upon the records unit to find it and ensure its correction. No police department should

take the stance that records personnel should not be reviewing the reports it produces. This is the very reason police records personnel exist- to not only maintain and disseminate information but also to process it and ensure its correctness. The records unit is the agency's body of expertise and personnel should be trained, empowered, and relied upon to produce valid statistics.

## Why Use an Outside Resource?



By virtue of the fact that erroneous crime figures are caused by any number of factors, including technological problems, police departments benefit greatly from turning to outside resources for assistance. Since the day to day operations of any organization must continue, the interruption of normal processes by spending time researching the cause of errors leads to a decrease in productivity, customer service, and employee morale. For a police department, this interruption of records operations translates into longer report turnaround times, backlogged tasks, crime statistics which are dated, and citizens who can't get copies of their reports in a timely manner. Furthermore, faulty data which is the result of technical problems with records management systems require a level of expertise often not found within police or even I.T. departments. While technology personnel may be the source of expertise in computer and systems maintenance and repair, they sometimes are not well versed in the complexities of UCR and its guidelines.

States typically have thousands of statutes on the books and police records management systems have databases which should contain the majority of them. Each of these statutes should have a corresponding unique UCR code which is what enables statistical crime reporting via UCR standards across the nation or "state to state". The sheer number alone of state statutes, along with complicated UCR rules, makes plenty of room for errors. If just one coding is off in a system's code table, the statistics for that

particular crime category will be invalid. The crime of burglary for example typically has various sub-sections for the type of forced entry, whether occupied or unoccupied, armed or unarmed offenders, etc. A one digit error in the master UCR code for the burglary chapter could potentially cause reporting errors in all categories of burglary. This phenomenon is compounded immensely due to the fact that police departments often borrow or cut and paste code tables from other departments as a matter of convenience. The result: tables with thousands of statutes which inevitably contain errors get passed along from agency to agency as they procure new RMS systems, update existing tables, or want to replace tables in their entirety. The accumulation of junk data is a real concern. Getting rid of it is an even bigger problem.
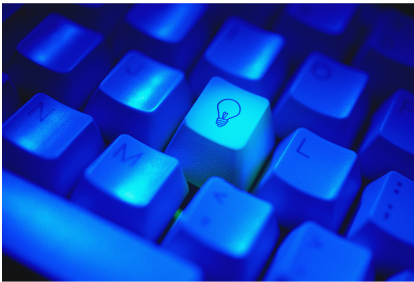


Very few police departments have the internal resources or time to scour the vast amount of electronic data made up of code tables, pick lists, UCR coding, and prior police reports in general in order to determine the source of errors and the correction thereof. Validating an entire code table requires extremely meticulous work and painstaking care so as to ensure every statute, sub section, title, and UCR code are properly listed. Utilizing the services of an outside consultant with specific expertise in law enforcement reporting ensures the agency can continue efficient operations without consuming valuable employee time, increasing overtime, and risking future problematic crime statistics.

Police Records and Information Management Group was formed by police personnel who have worked in "Records". The company specializes in records management solutions designed to relieve agencies of the challenges inherent in this area of police work that personnel typically shy away from. We have the experience and expertise to alleviate agencies of the burden of assessing and correcting the most common and the most difficult problems that occur in police records management.

By implementing strategic but simple operational changes in workflows and processes, we have consistently lowered report turnaround times from an average of 7 days to 3 days. We have also lowered the average report error rate from 25% to 5%. If one quarter of reports are making it through to Records with mistakes, even after supervisory review, Records personnel are spending 25% more time on processing information than they should be.

## Our History

Lt. Edward Claughton, company founder and owner, began working in police records as the Records Sergeant for an agency which was in desperate need of change in its records unit. Due to recent turnover at the time, coupled with the purchase of a new CAD/RMS/MFR system for the department, the records unit was in complete disarray. Major problems existed operationally and administratively which were causing high report error rates, inaccurate crime statistics, slow report turnaround times, and inefficient workflows among other things. Lt. Claughton and his staff proceeded with a complete operational analysis of the unit and over the course of several years implemented new protocol, developed operational manuals, procured new technologies, trained employees, and overhauled business and records management practices. These changes turned what was once the most dysfunctional unit of the department into the most efficient and successful one. As a result of this success and the networking which occurred during this time, other agencies including the Miami Beach, Largo, and Cape Coral Police Departments conducted site visits to analyze the records unit operations and successes.

In June 2006, Lt. Claughton was invited to speak at an International Association of Chief's of Police conference in Grapevine, Texas, on police records management. Subsequent to this presentation he began to receive inquiries from agencies around the country asking for assistance and copies of policies and manuals. It was then it became apparent that his police records unit had become a model for other agencies and thus he opened his business, Claughton Corps, and provided training in records management and police reporting to the majority of police and sheriff's departments in Florida.

In 2009 after receiving further requests for training from around the country and developing the Records Room newsletter, he renamed the company to what it is today, Police Records and Information Management Group which is now expanding beyond Florida as law enforcement's premier source of police records training and consulting services.

## Agencies We Have Trained

Ft. Lauderdale PD
Hialeah PD
Palm Bay PD
Sarasota PD
Aventura PD
Cape Coral PD
North Miami PD
Ft. Walton Beach PD
West Melbourne PD
Brevard Sheriff's Office
Indian River Sheriff's Office
Delray Beach PD
Titusville PD
Melbourne PD
Atlantic Beach PD
Indian River Shores PD
Sebastian PD
Cocoa Beach PD
Winter Park PD
Putnam County Sheriff's Office

Venice PD
Lauderhill PD
Largo PD
Leesburg PD
Clay County Sheriff's Office
Pinellas Park PD
Punta Gorda PD
Treasure Island PD
Haines City PD
North Port PD
Ocoee PD
Wilton Manors PD
Manapalan PD
Coconut Creek PD
Lake County Sheriff's Office
Chiefland PD
Polk County Sheriff's Office
Levy County Sheriff's Office
Seminole PD
Hallandale Beach PD

Berwyn PD
Quincy PD
Palantine PD
Woodale PD
Elk Grove PD
Park Ridge PD
Park Forest PD
Hanover Park PD



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