



SONORA POLICE DEPARTMENT MANAGEMENT STUDY

COMMISSION ON PEACE OFFICER STANDARDS AND TRAINING

AUGUST 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In early 2024, Chief VanderWiel of the Sonora Police Department (SPD) and the California Commission of Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) collaborated on a management study for his agency. The goals of any management study are to understand organizational behavior and provide a roadmap that enhances efficiency while effectively managing an agency's resources. For this study, Chief VanderWiel requested the study focus on the following areas:

- Organizational structure and administration (Chapter 1)
 - Sworn staff (Chapter 2)
 - Professional staff (Chapter 3)
- Evaluation of infrastructure and facilities (Chapter 4)
- Technology (Chapter 5)

The information contained in this report is the product of policy review, in-person interviews, an employee survey, and an in-person review of SPD facilities. This report contains recommendations involving the requested areas and other topics that were revealed during each element of the study.

It is important for the reader to bear in mind that the recommendations made by POST are exactly that: recommendations. Organizations must assess these recommendations in light of their own unique cultural, political, historical, and financial circumstances. Agencies are encouraged to view these recommendations as a starting point to generate discussions with managers, staff, political entities, and the community, and if necessary, to use the recommendations as a preliminary point for policy development to ensure agencies are best serving the future needs of their stakeholders.

Priority 1 recommendations (highest importance)	
Creation of professional staff supervisor position	Chapter 1 & 2
Increase sworn supervision to cover all hours of operation	Chapter 2
Address immediate safety and security issues with police facilities	Chapter 4
Address immediate environmental issues with server room (critical infrastructure)	Chapter 4
Address environmental issues with Evidence and Property areas at station	Chapter 4
Establish planning team for potential facility alternatives	Chapter 4

Priority 2 recommendations	
Addition of an executive/administrative assistant position	Chapter 1
Placement of personnel in an investigative/detective position	Chapter 2
Identify personnel for crime analysis duties	Chapter 2
Develop and apply a records retention schedule	Chapter 3
Conduct audit of records section to evaluate effectiveness and efficiency	Chapter 3
Address lack of functional area for female personnel (Sworn and Professional staff)	Chapter 3
Address functional improvements for Professional facilities and duties	Chapters 2 & 3
Provide department cellphones to personnel in the field	Chapter 5

Priority 3 recommendations	
Development of internship program	Chapter 1
Address communication obstacles between IT and Sworn officers	Chapter 2
Develop visitor log for entry into property/evidence area	Chapter 3
Develop method to locate officers in real time via GPS or other technology	Chapter 5
Consider online reporting	Chapter 5
Electronic license plate/records check capabilities in the field	Chapter 5

This report and subsequent recommendations are based upon the fundamental mission of POST, to continually enhance the professionalism of California law enforcement agencies in serving their communities. The leadership of the Sonora Police Department are encouraged to utilize this report as a roadmap for meeting the constant evolution of the law enforcement profession and most importantly, the expectations of its citizens.

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MANAGEMENT STUDIES

Management studies are provided by the California Commission on Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) in accordance with Commission Regulation 1016, which provides that in accordance with Penal Code section 13513 upon the request of a local jurisdiction, the Commission shall provide a counseling service to such local jurisdiction for the purpose of improving the administration, management or operations of a police agency and may aid such jurisdiction in implementing improved practices and techniques. Such service shall be in accordance with Commission policy and guidelines for counseling services as provided in this Commission procedure.

Management counseling services shall be provided only to local law enforcement agencies.

Any POST-participating agency is eligible to request a study through the Management Counseling and Projects Bureau (MCPB) at POST. Applications can be found online and must be submitted through the POST website or by the link below:

POST - Management Studies website link

OVERVIEW

The City of Sonora is a historic town located in the Sierra Nevada foothills and serves as the county seat of Tuolumne County. Sonora covers approximately 3.5 square miles with an estimated population of 4,917 residents. As the lone incorporated city in Tuolumne County, Sonora functions as the shopping, dining and business hub for the region. As such Sonora's estimated day time population is over 25,000.

The primary role of any police department is to ensure public safety within the community. The size of a police agency influences how this gets done. The Sonora Police Department (SPD) is a small agency with 14 sworn positions and 24 total funded positions which includes one vacancy. SPD size provides advantages and disadvantages for Chief VanderWiel in terms of organizational structure, resources, and community engagement.

The size of SPD allows for a flatter organizational structure providing the ability for rapid decision-making and communication. Officers are able to focus heavily on community-based policing with personalized interactions which helps with the goal in building strong relationships with citizens in Sonora. Simultaneously the size of SPD means they must meet their goals with less resources. SPD personnel, both sworn and professional staff, are tasked with several collateral duties with limited access to specialized technology and equipment.

SCOPE & METHODOLOGY

Chief of Police Turu VanderWiel requested an organizational review of his agency from POST. In the initial meeting with Chief VanderWiel he stressed his desire for an independent, thorough review of the organization to identify areas to improve, including any policy, procedure, practice or the structure of the organization. His primary areas of interest surrounded the following areas:

- Organizational structure and administration (Chapter 1)
 - Sworn staff (Chapter 2)
 - Professional staff (Chapter 3)
- Evaluation of infrastructure and facilities (Chapter 4)
- Technology (Chapter 5)

POST has endeavored to keep these priorities in mind during the course of the study while simultaneously providing assessment to other topics revealed outside of the identified priorities.

The methodology selected for the organizational review of SPD include:

- Staff interviews
- Site assessment
- Employee survey
- Documents review

On August 5-7, 2024, Law Enforcement Consultants Steve Fisher and Kevin Hatano, from the POST Management Counseling and Projects Bureau (MCPB), met with Chief VanderWiel and SPD personnel. During the site visit, LEC's were able to interview SPD staff in both sworn and professional staff capacities. Each were identified as subject matter experts, who were chosen to represent each functional area to be examined. Personnel were asked a series of questions, designed to serve as prompts, which fostered further discussions regarding departmental policies and practices.

LEC Fisher and Hatano were provided a site tour of the SPD police station located at 100 South Green Street in Sonora. The site review included all functional areas of the station.

In addition to the interviews, POST Consultants reviewed a wide range of documents to audit and assess the practices as described by SPD personnel.

After the site visit, an anonymous online survey was administered to all department employees. The goal of the survey was to obtain unfiltered input from staff as to any organizational, operational or cultural issues within SPD. At the conclusion of the survey POST received 13 completed responses. POST utilizes these results as a reference in this

report and leaves interpretation of survey results to Chief VanderWiel and his management team.

The recommendations are based upon professional research integrated with current law enforcement best practices, the most up to date standards for law enforcement training and the combined breadth of experience and knowledge of Law Enforcement Consultants within the POST Management Counseling and Projects Bureau (MCPB). Integrated with the information and feedback provided by SPD personnel, this report is designed to provide a thoughtful examination and critical evaluation of SPD and their current practices. Ultimately, the intent of this report is to assist the department in becoming more efficient and effective in the delivery of law enforcement services to their community.

CHAPTER 1

ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

The Sonora Police Department consists of 24.3 total positions authorized by the city, 14 of which are full time sworn officers. At the time of the study, one sworn vacancy is remaining in the department. A total of eight officers are assigned to patrol, two of which are in field training with an anticipated completion date, 2024-2025 fiscal year. One new officer is currently attending the academy with an anticipated start date of field training, in the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

After several years of challenging recruitment and retention of Police Department staff, the City of Sonora recently took proactive and aggressive steps to increase hiring. Through salary increases and \$50,000 hiring bonuses the Police Department has been able to make several key hires to lower their vacancy rate to one sworn and zero non-sworn personnel.

Table 1.1 – Budgeted and actual staffing of Sonora Police Department at the time of study.

POSITION	APPROVED FTE	ACTUAL
Chief of Police	1.0	1.0
Police Lieutenant	1.0	1.0
Police Sergeant	2.0	2.0
Police Officer (includes 2 Corporals)	10.0	9.0
Reserve Police Officers	0.2	0.2
Community Services Officer (FT/PT)	1.6	1.6
Dispatcher/Records Specialists	5.0	5.0
Dispatcher/Records Specialists (P/T)	1.3	1.3
Police Records Technician	1.00	1.00
Information Technology Tech (P/T)	0.2	0.2
Homeless Outreach Coordinator	1.00	1.00

Law enforcement organizations should be structured and staffed in such a way that they are able to address community expectations and reflect the mission, vision and values of the agency. Under the leadership of Chief VanderWiel, the Sonora Police Department is structured in a manner that reflects the nature of a small community.

With a primary goal of safeguarding life and property, (SPD's mission statement), the agency focus is on providing first responder type police services.

Operations Lieutenant, Lt. Hannula, serves as the lone manager for both the sworn and non-sworn personnel. Two sworn supervisors, Sergeants, oversee both sworn and non-sworn personnel. Between the Chief, Lieutenant and two Sergeants, they generally fill the role as the supervisor of one to three officers working on the streets of Sonora and one dispatcher at any point in the day.

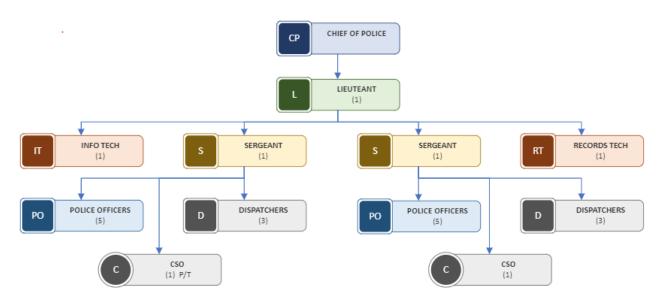


Table 1.2 – Organization chart of Sonora Police Department at the time of study.

In general, POST supports agencies that attempt to leverage professional staff, command-level positions. They tend to be easier to fill and more cost effective than comparable sworn classifications. In addition, professional supervisors and managers can be an effective complement to the agency's management team, bringing specialized and desirable skills sets; and the additional hierarchy serves to provide promotional opportunities for exemplary employees in non-sworn classifications.

10.1 budgeted positions make up the professional staff of SPD. However, no professional staff supervisor is included in the hierarchy of the organization. All professional staff report to sworn supervisors and managers for operational and administrative duties. The conversion of a current professional staff position to a supervisor capacity would provide an ideal span of control for this position with a 9.1 to 1 ratio. Furthermore, this would increase the oversight of professional employees while alleviating some of the responsibility from sworn supervisors.

Recommendation 1.1

POST recommends the creation or adjustment of a current civilian position to a civilian supervisor. This position would have responsibility over all the non-field functions at SPD (Evidence and Property unit, Dispatch, and Records units). Additionally, this position could have administrative supervision over civilian positions (CSO's) in the field. This adjustment would provide a higher level of coordination to complete necessary duties in each functional area and redistribute administrative duties from the Lieutenant and Sergeant positions to the new supervisor.

As part of this recommendation, POST conducted a review of similar sized agencies in California with a dispatch center. While the sample grouping is small due to the limited number of California agencies with these categories, the table reveals comparable agencies have a greater level of supervisory positions at the civilian level.

Table 1.3 – 2024 comparable agency with similar sworn, professional staff and dispatch center.

AGENCY	SWORN OFFICERS	CIVILIAN STAFF	CIVILIAN SUPV/MANAGER
Sonora PD	14	10.1	0
Agency A	13	6	1
Agency B	9	6	1
Agency C	12	6	1
Agency D	14	6+5 P/T	1
Agency E	11	8	1

COLLATERAL DUTIES

In most police departments, several positions have collateral duties that supplement their primary jobs. In small police departments like SPD, staff must wear multiple hats due to limited personnel and resources. These collateral duties are essential as they allow the department to function effectively despite limited personnel. These additional roles help the agency meet its operational, administrative, and community service goals without requiring a large workforce.

State law and SPD policy add further requirements and duties with the addition of coordinator roles and responsibilities (See Appendix A for list of required assignments). To further exacerbate matters, due to limited personnel and resources, the Chief and

Lieutenant frequently step into roles that are generally handled by line staff, including patrol and dispatch functions.

While these duties are natural expectations in a small agency, they complicate executive tasks and create obstacles to administration of police leadership to the community. The addition of a full-time executive assistant would be significant progress in mitigating many of the obstacles to the administrative processes of managing a small agency.

Recommendation 1.2

POST recommends the addition of an administrative assistant to the staff at SPD. The position would focus on administrative support including scheduling, correspondence, and record-keeping. Providing a higher level of efficiency and time management for the Chief and Lieutenant would enable SPD executives to focus on leadership, strategic planning and crisis management. The position would also provide administrative support to all personnel and streamline communications inside and out of the agency.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL

SPD has recently instituted an aggressive recruitment of staffing for sworn and non-sworn personnel in the agency through signing bonuses and salary increases. At the time of the Consultant's visit, SPD and the city of Sonora have also contracted with an outside vendor to identify recruiting strategies and produce a recruiting video.

Survey respondents were asked about their perceptions regarding their specific workloads. The surveys were not disaggregated by position, therefore the responses reflect general beliefs about whether or not the Department, as a whole, feels that their workload is manageable. Discussions regarding the workload for specific areas will be discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

A majority of respondents agreed that their workload was "manageable", with 53% either strongly agreeing or agreeing (7 respondents). 31% (4 respondents) disagreed while 0% strongly disagreed. However, due to the way surveys are structured, and responses are gathered, Consultants cannot identify if there are specific units that feel particular pressure.

A strong majority (over 90% of responses) indicated one of SPD's greatest strengths was the strong sense of "family" and support by department administration. This result implies a high sense of job satisfaction with surveyed personnel.

Recent efforts of city administration and SPD leadership in recruiting have been clearly effective. POST highly encourages maintaining such efforts as the low vacancy rate and perceived satisfaction level of SPD employees is high.

Findings 1.3

The effectiveness of SPD's recruiting and retention efforts is recognized as highly beneficial to the department and community.

Recommendation 1.4

Consider partnering with the local community college and/or university to establish an internship opportunity for students looking to enter a career in law enforcement. Positions can include clerical or administrative support in non-sworn areas of SPD. Internships not only provide valuable opportunities for students but can also provide improved employment prospects, opportunities to engage young local students and enhance future recruitment efforts.

CHAPTER 2

SWORN PERSONNEL

Under Chief VanderWeil, the Operations section for SPD bears the full responsibility for police services to the city of Sonora. The Operations Lieutenant manages the Operations section and is the direct supervisor to the two Sergeants, one Records Technician and one IT representative.

The Operations section also includes all sworn personnel performing patrol operations and investigations. It also includes all non-sworn personnel including Evidence and Property, Records, Dispatch and Community Services.

In evaluating staffing models, due to the small size of Sonora and staffing levels of SPD, officers are deployed using a minimum staffing type model. This approach requires supervisors to estimate enough staff that must be deployed to ensure officer safety and provide an adequate level of protection to the public. This is a common form of staffing deployment.

There are advantages of this type of model in small jurisdictions like Sonora. A minimum staffing model ensures at least a minimum response capability, regardless of calls for service received. Additionally, depending on the jurisdiction, minimum staffing may be instituted to provide a margin of officer safety, when another allied agency assistance is unavailable.

OPERATIONS

The sworn personnel of SPD are all assigned to patrol operations. Under the direct management of the Operations Lieutenant, the staffing of sworn personnel at SPD are as follows:

- Two Sergeants
- Nine Police Officers

At the time of POST's site visit one of the Police Officer positions was attending an academy and did not factor into actual staffing.

¹ (Wilson, Jeremy M., and Alexander Weiss., 2014. A Performance-Based Approach to Police Staffing and Allocation. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services.)

SUPERVISORS

POST recognizes patrol supervision plays a critical role in ensuring risk management, policy adherence, accountability, and successful outcomes in critical incidents. If the workforce is less experienced, as often happens with less tenured officers on late nights and weekends, this need becomes even more essential. POST strongly encourage agency's place a high priority on front line supervision.

At SPD, both Sergeants work 10-hour shifts from 1700-0300 working opposite ends of the week with an overlap day on Wednesday. They primarily supervise their shift of one or two Officers, a dispatcher and have an established roster of personnel to conduct administrative duties. Each Sergeant has numerous collateral duties in addition to their primary functions.

Sergeants at SPD supervise Police Officers with an average tenure under 5 years of service. Comparatively the average California Peace Officer tenure in 2023 is 13.48 years. This low average tenure for Police Officers at SPD increases the level of supervision and accountability needed to be provided by Sergeants in patrol.

The Corporal position at SPD has some acting supervisor role in patrol. Currently one Corporal is assigned to 0800-1800 during the week.

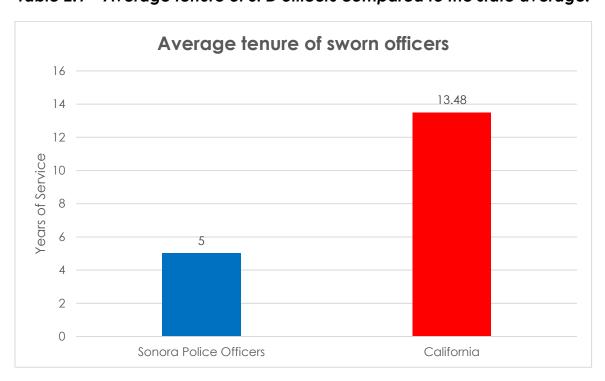


Table 2.1 – Average tenure of SPD officers compared to the state average.

Recommendation 2.1

SPD should increase the number of Sergeant's or Corporal's to help fill the void of supervision during various hours in the patrol day. POST strongly supports all agencies to have an increased level of supervision available at all hours of operation. Further supervision would help mitigate risk for SPD and the City and improve accountability of leadership.²

POLICE OFFICERS

Each Officer works 12-hour shifts from 0600-1800 or 1800-0600 except for one Officer identified as a Corporal. The Corporal works a 10-hour shift from 0800-1800 and serves as an acting supervisor during their shift. In addition to the core functions as a patrol officer, one Officer is a K9 handler and one Officer serves as a Field Training Officer.

Police Officers generally work with one or two other Officers during their shift. Although the on-duty staffing is low, survey results indicate that employees generally feel they have the necessary time to perform their job well.

During POST Consultant's interviews with sworn staff, the inability to write reports on mobile computers in patrol vehicles was mentioned multiple times. Survey results revealed similar results with 78% of responses indicating they wrote reports inside the police station instead of their mobile computer. Simultaneously, our conversation with the IT staff indicated that Police Officers were able to write reports on mobile computers.

Recommendation 2.2

IT should provide clear communication and training to Police Officers on how to write reports on their mobile computers. Currently, when an officer must return to the station to write a report, this leaves one officer in the field. Having the ability to write reports in the field would increase their presence in the city and increase efficiency in their response to calls for service.

INVESTIGATIONS

SPD has no personnel assigned specifically to investigations. Officers are expected to conduct any follow up investigation as part of their regularly assigned patrol shift. This creates an obstacle to conducting follow up investigations as often time cases can

² (U.S. Department of Justice, Law Enforcement Best Practices: Learned from the Field, 2019)

require travel outside of SPD jurisdiction and need to occur outside of the specific hours of each Officer's shift. Furthermore, investigative steps often require extensive scheduling of and obtaining interviews, report writing, search warrant preparation and collaboration with the District Attorney's office.

*** **Note**: SPD has a plan to install the Corporal position into an investigative capacity once all Officers have completed field training and are able to function as a solo unit.

Recommendation 2.3

SPD should create Detective position to meet the investigative needs of their community. The position would allow Police Officers assigned to patrol to focus more intently on first responder duties and immediate responses. The Detective would provide specialized skills which are otherwise incompatible with the first responder duties.

Recommendation 2.4

In creating a Detective position, the individual should also be assigned the duty of crime analysis, which SPD does not currently possess. Through analysis, patterns and trends could be identified in the community which could help prevent crime. In small jurisdictions, crime patterns may go unnoticed without a detective's focused attention to such trends. Crime analysis also provides a focused response for SPD and City leaders to the community.

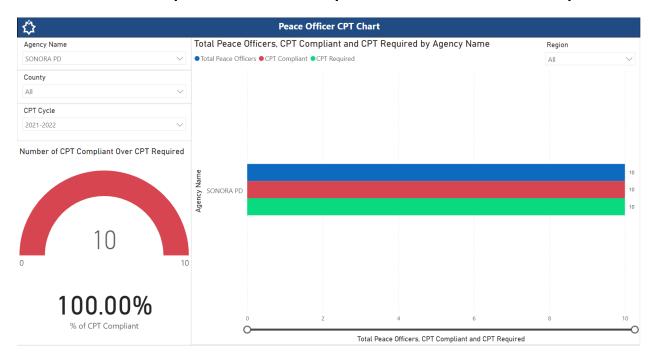
TRAINING

Continuous, career long training for peace officers of every rank is the standard in California. Chief VanderWiel made it clear to POST Consultants that he was fully committed to ensuring ongoing training was available for all members of his department. Updated and relevant training helps ensure peace officers are current with new laws and procedures, enhances officer safety, reduces the use of force through modern techniques, and provides liability and legal protection for officers and agencies.

POST requires each officer to obtain 24 hours or more of Continuing Professional Training (CPT) every two-year cycle. The statewide CPT compliance average for is **92.47%** of peace officers for 2021-2022 (last full CPT cycle).

SPD's CPT compliance percentage for 2021-2022 was 100%

Table 2.2 – CPT compliance of the sworn personnel at Sonora Police Department



In addition to full compliance with CPT requirements, SPD stresses the importance of training beyond the minimum requirement. Many of the employees interviewed by POST Consultants indicated they were allowed to attend additional training courses to enhance their experience and careers with SPD. This encouragement by Chief VanderWiel for continued training by all employees is commendable and well received.

CHAPTER 3

PROFESSIONAL STAFF

As previously indicated, professional staff perform critical functions in law enforcement agencies today. They increase efficiency in operational and administrative functions, deliver specialized expertise in support roles while delivering cost-effective personnel to police and city administrators.

At SPD, full-time and part-time civilian staff make up the budgeted 10.1 civilian positions allotted to the agency. In further testament to the successful recruiting and retention program at SPD, they have a 0% vacancy rate in civilian positions.

COMMUNITY SERVICES OFFICERS

A Community Services Officer (CSO) in law enforcement supports police operations by handling non-sworn duties such as public assistance, crime prevention education, traffic and parking enforcement, and report taking for minor incidents. They help build positive community relations through outreach and engagement, allowing sworn officers to focus on more critical tasks. While CSOs do not carry firearms or have arrest powers, their role is essential in enhancing public safety, fostering trust, and ensuring efficient law enforcement operations

The staffing of CSO's in SPD are as follows:

- One full time CSO
- One part time CSO

The full time CSO position is dedicated to the field services aspect of SPD with only a collateral duty of acting as one of SPD's Public Information Officers (PIO). The part time CSO is the lead staff for the Evidence and Property and consequently is where the majority of his time is worked.

RECORDS

In law enforcement the Records management function has a critical role in today's police agencies. Proper management of records helps ensure legal compliance and accountability while simultaneously maintaining the integrity of evidence, supporting proper criminal filings, and safeguards the agency against legal risks. Effective records management also encourages transparency and public trust by ensuring accurate documentation and prompt fulfillment of public records requests. Additionally, the

mandatory reporting of specific records to federal and state agencies provides valuable data for analyzing trends and improving law enforcement strategies.

The Records section of SPD is staffed as follows:

- One full time Records Technician
- Five full time Dispatcher/Records Specialists
- Two part time Dispatcher/Records Specialists

The Records Technician is the lead person in the Records section. While the principal functions of this position are in the Records section, the listed job duties include supporting other non-sworn job functions in the department. The POST Consultant's conversation with the Records Technician indicated an estimated ratio of 4 out of 9 shifts are worked in Dispatch instead of Records.

The Dispatcher/Records Specialists' primary job function is that of a Dispatcher. The POST Consultant conversations with Dispatcher/Records Specialists indicated they had minimal functions in the Records section. Furthermore, one of the part time Dispatcher/Records Specialists fills the Information Technology (IT) duties for the agency in addition to their principal job duties.

***NOTE: At the time of the site visit by POST, two full time and one part time Dispatcher/Records Specialists were in training. Upon the successful completion of their training program each will be able to fill the full duties of a Dispatcher/Records Specialist.

RECORDS FUNCTION DELAYS

SPD Records staff is able to meet the mandatory reporting requirements for California law enforcement agencies (racial profiling data, civilian complaints, crime data, use of force, and hate crimes). However, there are significant delays in the filing of registrations, juvenile case purging, District Attorney phone call requests and several other types of record filings. These delays appeared to be due to the lack of staffing and time available for current Records staff.

PURGING

POST staff asked about the routine purging of files in the department. No set schedule for the purging of paper and electronic files and SPD staff were aware of documents dating back to 2000.

POST RECORDS SELF-ASSESSMENT

Because it is a critical function within most law enforcement organizations, POST publishes the Law Enforcement Records Management Guide to supplement in person training for supervisors and managers of Records divisions. The purpose of the Guide and the accompanying self-evaluation document, are to assist agencies in developing standardized guidelines for the management of the law enforcement records function, detailing best practices for the receipt, storage, and disposition of records maintained by the agency, and conducting evaluations of these systems. SPD Records staff indicated they had not reviewed or completed the POST Records Management Guide.

The 6th Edition (2022) of the Records Management Guide is available for downloading on the POST website at:

POST 6th Edition Law Enforcement Records Management Guide

Recommendation 3.1

Work with City staff to develop, implement and update a Records Retention Schedule. Refer to the POST Records Management Guide and other agencies to develop a policy for this process.

Recommendation 3.2

Consider the creation of a civilian supervisor position to oversee the Records function for SPD. The supervisor would coordinate, review and assign Dispatcher/Records Specialists to tasks needed in the Records area of SPD.

This could be part of an overall civilian supervisor position added to SPD to oversee Records, Dispatch and Evidence and Property (see recommendation 1.1). This position would be well suited for oversight of each area considering the large number of collateral duties each Dispatcher/Records Specialist is tasked with.

Recommendation 3.3

POST recommends SPD conduct a complete and thorough audit of the records section to include the management, operations and compliances of the records section.

Recommendation 3.4

As soon as practical, SPD should have Records staff complete the POST Law Enforcement Records Function Agency Self-Evaluation guide to assist in adhering to the best practices for Records management.

DISPATCH

Dispatch Centers serve as the communication hub that coordinates responses to emergencies and incidents in law enforcement agencies. Dispatchers often provide the first contact and impression for police agencies to the public. They ensure rapid and efficient resource allocation, enhance officer and public safety, and provide critical guidance during emergencies. By maintaining 24/7 operations, managing officer responses, and coordinating with multiple agencies, dispatch centers are the lifeline for our community's response in emergency situations.

The Dispatch Center for SPD answers all 911 emergency calls within the city of Sonora. Dispatchers make initial assessments to triage the emergency calls for a police or fire department related response. As such the SPD Dispatch Center is a critical piece of infrastructure for the community.

The Dispatch Center for SPD is staffed as follows:

- Five full time Dispatcher/Records Specialists
- Two part time Dispatcher/Records Specialists

The principal function of an employee in this classification is to receive Emergency and nonemergency calls and to dispatch personnel following prescribed procedures; perform a full range of clerical and customer service duties involved in the maintenance, processing, and distribution of Police records; performs directly related work as required.

Recommendation 3.5

Consider the creation of a civilian supervisor position to oversee the Dispatch function for SPD. The supervisor would coordinate, review and assign Dispatcher/Records Specialists tasks related to Dispatch. This position would also reduce the added duty of administrative oversight required by sworn supervisors and managers.

This could be part of an overall civilian supervisor position added to SPD to oversee Records, Dispatch and Evidence and Property (see recommendation 1.1). This position would be well suited for oversight of each area considering the large number of collateral duties each Dispatcher/Records Specialist is tasked with.

DISPATCH TRAINING

Dispatchers have similar standards for training in California as peace officers. POST requires each dispatcher to obtain 24 hours or more of Continuing Professional Training (CPT) every two-year cycle. The statewide average for dispatchers during the last full CPT cycle (2021-2022) was **89.51%** compliance.

SPD's dispatcher CPT compliance percentage for 2021-2022 was 100%

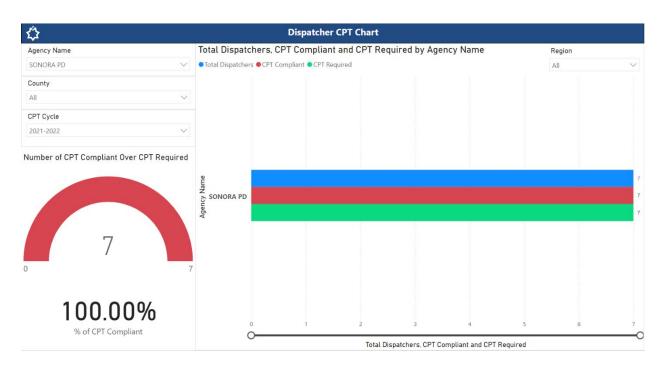


Table 2.3 – CPT compliance of the dispatcher personnel at Sonora Police Department

The high level of CPT training compliance with dispatch and sworn personnel reflects the high commitment to continued training emphasized by Chief VanderWiel.

EVIDENCE AND PROPERTY

The law enforcement evidence/property function is vital to the criminal justice process. The management of this function has become increasingly complex due, in part, to factors related to legislative mandates, hazardous material storage, the protection and preservation of biological/DNA-related material, security, chain of custody, and the training of evidence/property personnel. The failure to manage the evidence and property function can affect the successful prosecution of criminal violators, resulting in agency criminal and civil liability, or the loss of public confidence.

Effective policies and procedures must be established in order to efficiently submit and retrieve items of evidence and property. To support the evidence and property function, managerial and executive personnel must ensure that essential training, both initial and ongoing, is identified and provided, and an adequate budget for sustained effective operation. Staff safety, storage facility security, and the ability to accurately catalog and track evidence and property are paramount to reducing liability exposure, thus increasing the credibility and defensibility of the agency.

To assist agencies with the management of the evidence and property, POST developed, published, and distributed to California law enforcement agencies the Law Enforcement Property & Evidence Management Guide. The 4th Edition (2022) of the guide is available for downloading on the POST website at:

POST Property & Evidence Management Guide, 4th Edition

The Evidence and Property section of SPD is staffed as follows:

- One part time CSO (Evidence and Property lead staff)
- One Lieutenant (as the support alternative for the CSO)

The job duties of the part time CSO includes the operating and maintenance of the property/evidence room. POST found this position works approximately 30 hours per week with an estimated 75% of time dedicated to Evidence and Property. This CSO is the principal lead in Evidence and Property while the Lieutenant is in the support role.

EVIDENCE AND PROPERTY AUDITS

SPD policy indicates the supervisor of the evidence custodian (a Patrol Sergeant) shall conduct an inspection of the evidence storage facilities and practices on a monthly basis.

SPD policy indicates an annual audit of evidence shall be conducted by a Lieutenant not routinely or directly connected with evidence control. In practice, the only Lieutenant at SPD is the support person for the Evidence and Property area.

Staff indicated the last audit of the Evidence and Property section occurred in May 2024. Additionally, staff was aware of the POST Law Enforcement Property & Evidence Management Guide and had utilized the document during their annual audit.

TRAINING - EVIDENCE AND PROPERTY PERSONNEL

Both staff members involved in Evidence and Property have attended the basic POST 24-hour Evidence and Property Function Management course as part of their assigned role in this section.

Recommendation 3.6

Consider the creation of a civilian supervisor position to oversee the Evidence and Property function for SPD. A civilian supervisor would provide a separation of Evidence away from the Operational function of the agency and meet the industry standard in this respect.

This could be part of an overall civilian supervisor position added to SPD to oversee Records, Dispatch and Evidence and Property (see recommendation 1.1). This position would be well suited for oversight of each area considering the large number of collateral duties each Dispatcher/Records Specialist is tasked with.

Additionally, this position would afford the opportunity to remove the Lieutenant from the backup position in Evidence and Property and more appropriately provide administrative separation of management.

Recommendation 3.7

Encourage Evidence and Property staff to attend annual training through California Association of Property and Evidence (CAPE), the International Association of Property and Evidence and regional chapter trainings or webinars.

Recommendation 3.8

Create and utilize a written directive addressing the use of a visitor log in the evidence and property storage area to include:

Requiring ANY person (other than assigned evidence/property personnel) entering and departing the evidence/property storage area to sign an established visitor log which identifies the individual, date and time of entry/exit, and purpose for entering the storage area AND ensuring that all visitors be in the immediate physical presence of agency evidence and property personnel while inside the evidence and property area.

CHAPTER 4

INFRASTRUCTURE

During the site visit with POST consultants, the Sonora Police infrastructure and technology were reviewed as part of the organizational review. The Sonora Police station is located in the city's historic center with public access from multiple directions on the street. The facility used by the Sonora Police is a former automotive repair garage built in the 1950's. The Sonora Police Department moved into their current facility in 1995 as a temporary solution to a then outdated and ill-suited station.

The POST review of current SPD facilities found several areas of concern. The following areas and issues were observed as part of the facility review.

Recommendation 4.1 SERVER ROOM

Recommendation 4.2	

EVIDENCE PROCESSING AND STORAGE AREA

The area designed for processing and storage of evidence is located in the garage area of the police station. This area is functional but lacks some significant employee safety capabilities. The area designed for the processing of narcotics by officers has no air exchange ventilation system. Furthermore, an appropriate wash station or running water is available for employees in the processing area. While PPE is readily available, any exposure due to the lack of ventilation and a wash station increase the vulnerability of employees being exposed to toxic and dangerous substances.

A cursory tour of the evidence storage area was conducted by POST Consultants during the site visit. The storage area was clean and organized. The refrigerator/freezer evidence units were located inside the storage area. The facility included a power backup generator in case of a power outage. The refrigerator/freezer evidence units did not include an alarm with temperature sensors.

As with other areas of the station, the evidence storage area is susceptible to moisture from rain during inclement weather due to the design, age and function of police station. As such, most items in the evidence storage area are stored on racks off the floor to limit possible exposure to moisture.

Recommendation 4.3

POST encourages SPD to explore mobile or stationary air filtration or exchanges systems available. They are designed to help mitigate exposures to harmful chemicals or narcotics that employees may become exposed during the course of their duties.

Recommendation 4.4

POST recommends obtaining alarms for evidentiary refrigerator and freezer that are in line with industry standards.

Recommendation 4.5

Evidence and Property areas should be fortified from any moisture or other environmental factors that could potentially damage items with evidentiary value.

PERSONNEL FUNCTION

Reasonable accommodations for employees are insufficient. Due to the lack of space in the building only one locker room exists for all employees at SPD. This same locker room also serves as the lactation room for female employees. Female employees do have small lockers available to them in the lone female bathroom. This layout could be a significant deterrent for the recruitment of female officers.

Overall, the SPD facilities does not meet basic minimum industry standards for a modern law enforcement station.

Recommendation 4.6

The police station building is insufficient to address the industry standards for employee requirements. Architectural experts should be consulted to determine the proper course and development of a female appropriate locker area in their current facility.

Recommendation 4.7

SPD and city leaders should prioritize the planning and development of an updated facility that can meet the safety, organizational and structural needs of SPD.

CHAPTER 5

TECHNOLOGY

Despite limited resources and outdated infrastructure, SPD has made recent advancements in technology. Often, small agencies must sustain outdated technology beyond the anticipated life expectancy of computer systems which can hinder their ability to comply with evolving regulations and techniques in law enforcement.

While many areas of technology at SPD meet current standards in law enforcement, this section of the report will focus on the technological areas identified for improvement. The recommendations involving hardware storage in the server room and other infrastructure related technology is discussed in the infrastructure section of this report.

DEPARTMENT CELLPHONES

At the time of the POST Consultant's visit, officers did not have access to department provided cellphones. This poses several issues for the agency.

Industry wide, there is a high frequency of use by officers who utilize cell phones to conduct agency business. Contacting complainants, witnesses and other agency related persons is the standard for officers in modern law enforcement. This ability makes officers more efficient and improves intel gathering opportunities at all levels. When officers do not have access to an agency phone, they generally utilize personal phones to accomplish the same goals. This can cause immediate conflict due to personal information gathering devices (ie, cellphones) becoming available in court proceedings. Additionally, there is the potential exposure officers open themselves up to in terms of protecting their personal information (phone numbers, etc).

Cellphones can also be a tool for law enforcement specific applications and resources that can be utilized by officers in the course of their duties.

Recommendation 5.1

SPD is encouraged to provide cell phones to officers to utilize during their work hours to reduce liability for officers using personal phones for business and increase transparency in terms of public records access.

GPS LOCATORS FOR OFFICERS

SPD dispatch facilities were recently upgraded to a modern level providing good integration between the community, dispatchers and officers. Dispatchers who were interviewed and observed at their workstations by POST Consultants gave positive reviews of the updated hardware and its functionality with dispatcher duties. One omission noted with the new hardware is the inability for dispatchers to identify in real-time the location of any officer.

Recommendation 5.2

POST encourages SPD to explore technology with basic real-time GPS functions to increase officer safety, efficiency and awareness. Potentially, combining the recommendation of agency provided cell phones (recommendation 5.1) could also provide GPS abilities for SPD.

AGENCY WEBSITE

Most law enforcement agencies across California have established public websites as a means of enhancing their service to the community. POST highly encourages this practice to all agencies as websites are often the primary source of information for community members. Ideally, the website should provide the full set of policies used by the agency, provide basic initial services, and be capable of answering common questions community members may frequently ask.

Online reporting systems available to law enforcement agencies today offer several advantages for streamlining operations and improving public services. In addition to minimizing dispatches of officers and reducing operational costs, they also allow citizens to report low level crimes 24 hours a day which can increase convenience for the public. Furthermore, online reporting can improve crime analysis data (Recommendation 2.4) to help provide clarity to crime analysts, police managers and city leaders.

Recently, California passed legislation regarding the destruction of firearms held in agency evidence and making that policy information available on a public website. SB 1019 specifies that destruction of a firearm means destroying the firearm in its entirety by smelting, shredding, crushing, or cutting all parts of the firearm, including any attachments. The bill also requires every law enforcement agency to develop and maintain a written policy regarding the destruction of firearms and shall make that policy available on its internet website. SB 1019 is effective January 1, 2025

The Sonora Police Department website is comprehensive, current, and informative. The home page of the website allows the viewer to learn about the SPD, including the mission and values, different divisions and their function, crime trends, information on joining SPD, frequently asked questions, and the ability to make a civilian complaint.

Recommendation 5.3

SB 1019 specifies that the destruction of a firearm means destroying it in its entirety by smelting, shredding, crushing, or cutting all parts of the firearm, including any attachments. The bill also requires every law enforcement agency to develop and maintain a written policy regarding the destruction of firearms and make that policy available on its website. SB 1019 is effective January 1, 2025.

Recommendation 5.4

POST encourages SPD to explore online reporting capabilities of their existing RMS system and its integration into a potential sworn Investigative position in the agency.

RECORDS CHECK CAPABILITIES IN THE FIELD

The capabilities of law enforcement personnel to complete vehicle, individual or other types of records check on computers in the field is a modern standard of police agencies in California. These capabilities provide rapid informed decision-making ability for officers during a variety of their daily duties in the field. Improved efficiency and increased officer safety are also significantly enhanced by providing critical information to officers in a timely and systematic fashion.

Currently, SPD does not have the capability of conducting these types of records checks in their patrol vehicles even though a laptop computer is part of their vehicle inventory.

Recommendation 5.5

POST suggests exploring the requirements with DOJ and hardware necessities to establish capabilities of conducting records checks of individuals and vehicles in the field by officers.

CONCLUSION

POST would like to thank Chief VanderWiel, Lieutenant Hannula, and the entire Sonora Police Department for their assistance and cooperation in this study. Without question, the Sonora Police Department is staffed with dedicated and committed law enforcement professionals that provide a high level of service to their community.

POST recognizes concepts and suggestions that may be effective for one agency may not be for another. Differences in the needs of communities, demographics and local challenges require agency leaders to tailor approaches to achieve the best outcomes with discussion and community engagement. All recommendations contained in this report are presented as opportunities to the Sonora Police Department to enhance the services provided with the professional standards of law enforcement in California.

The entire leadership and personnel of the Sonora Police Department should be commended for their efforts to be proactive in service and in supporting the citizens of their city.

APPENDIX A

Required coordinator positions as identified by law and/or SPD policy (Chapter 1)		
Crime Victim Liaison	Policy 305.9	
Hate Crime Coordinator	Policy 318.3	
Reserve Officer Coordinator	Policy 324	
Limited English Proficiency Coordinator	Policy 332	
ADA Coordinator	Policy 333	
Chaplaincy Coordinator	Policy 336.6	
Canine Coordinator	Policy 342.4	
Gun Violence Restraining Order Coordinator	Policy 345.9	
Community Relations Coordinator	Policy 346.4	
Racial and Identity Profiling Act (RIPA) Coordinator	Policy 401	
FTO Coordinator	Policy 417.6.1	
Homeless Liaison	Policy 428	
UAS Program Coordinator	Policy 606.4	
Military Equipment Coordinator	Policy 706.3	
Peer Support Coordinator	Policy 1004	
Exposure Control Officer	Policy 1007	
Wellness Coordinator	Policy 1031.3	

APPENDIX B

Online employee survey

APPENDIX C

References:

- Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, President's Task Force on 21st Century, 2015
- U.S. Department of Justice, Law Enforcement Best Practices: Learned from the Field,
 2019
- Wilson, Jeremy M., and Alexander Weiss., 2014. A Performance-Based Approach to Police Staffing and Allocation. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services