



NEWS

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New Chicago Crime Commission Gang Book offers unique view of Chicagoland street gangs

Insights into their growth and increased violence; use of social media; and Chicago/Suburban operations are revealed

January 26, 2012 - Chicago, IL – Today the Chicago Crime Commission released the most comprehensive compilation of data and information ever completed concerning street gangs in the Chicagoland area. There are an estimated 73 active gangs operating in Chicago. Law enforcement estimates between 68,000 and 150,000 gang members are operating in the entire metropolitan area, with the consensus opinion being upwards of 100,000. The National Gang Intelligence Center estimates more than 100,000 gang members for the Chicago metropolitan area.

With the steady formation and dissolution of small gangs, the recurrent convictions of both leaders and their ranks, and the impossibility of a census, authorities have difficulty tracking membership with precision. “Gang membership, by its nature, is difficult to quantify. Since crime is a definitive aspect of the gang lifestyle, members are reluctant to admit affiliation and thereby expose themselves and their fellow members to the threat of incarceration,” according to Jody Weis, President of the Chicago Crime Commission.

(more)

“Many residents of the city live and work within feet of a gang’s operations. Gangs constitute an entire sector of Chicago’s population, yet even the law enforcement organizations that watch them daily cannot precisely gauge the extent of their presence. Gangs’ mode of operation exists fully apart from civil society, yet the repercussions of their gun and drug related activities directly affect society’s well-being,” Weis added.

In 2012, law enforcement is increasingly aware of the breadth and severity of the gang problem, and the new obstacles for their fight against gangs. “In an attempt to aid in the gentrification of squalid neighborhoods, the city tore down many of its gang-ridden housing projects and forced families to seek residence elsewhere, usually in areas where they were unfamiliar,” said Weis. “If displaced gang members wanted new territory, they had to fight for it. Officials believe this is what caused Chicago to have one of the nation’s highest homicide rates for major cities in recent years,” he continued.

Now, after the massive relocations caused by the forced closing of public housing, accountability between gang leader and gang member has weakened. Over the past decade, there has been a marked change in gang structure. Street gangs, both large and small, have splintered into subgroups, or factions, each with its own distinct leader who controls no more than a few blocks. “In a few cases, these gangs ally and form a faction with combined gang power. The surge of power with the rise of these factions has allowed juveniles, typically between the ages of 15 to 17, to gain authority in their neighborhoods, a phenomenon previously uncommon in the original gang leadership system,” Weis said.

The Chicago Crime Commission Gang Book also explores current gang trends such as their use of social media. “Gangs’ use of social media incites violence and encourages gang members to respond to threats impulsively. Law enforcement estimates that more than two-thirds of all school related violence is spawned by social media. Fortunately, it is not just the gangs that use social media. It has also proven an incredibly effective investigative tool for the police,” Weis stated.

The Chicago Crime Commission Gang Book highlights gang profiles, Chicago gang maps, gangs in the suburbs, and present and past gang trends, each in its own section. Information in the gang profiles section includes a summary of the history, current gang statistics, the suburbs where the gangs are active, gang colors and identifiers, and current leadership of Chicago’s 70 most prominent gangs. (more)

Also included is data collected directly from the 2011 Chicago Crime Commission Survey of Gang and Drug Activity. In 2011 the Commission sent surveys to all 249 police agencies in the surrounding six-county area. A total of 170 or 68% of all departments responded, a 36% increase from the 81 Chicago area suburban police department responses to the previous survey in 2006.

Other key findings of the survey include:

- Graffiti, illegal drugs, and burglary are the most common criminal activities committed by gang members in the suburbs.
- The Latin Kings (reported by 108 police departments), the Gangster Disciples (reported by 78 police departments), the Surenos 13s (reported by 53 police departments), and the Maniac Latin Disciples and Vice Lords (each gang individually reported by 47 police departments) are the top 5 gangs noted as being active in the community of a responding suburb.
- The Latin Kings (reported by 48 police departments) and the Gangster Disciples (reported by 12 police departments) were the top two gangs reported of most concern to the responding suburbs.

“The Chicago Crime Commission Gang Book also highlights successes of the Gang School Safety Team and the Violence Reduction Strategy, and displays old gang manifestos outlining the gangs’ original laws and their current negligence of them,” Weis continued.

“The Chicago Crime Commission Gang Book was developed as a training tool to be used by law enforcement, parents, educators and business owners who may know little about street gangs operating in the city and suburbs,” he concluded.

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