

## Destination Zero Article

### **Don't Just Provide Training, Change a Culture,**

In October of 2012, Yolo County Sheriff Ed Prieto wanted a command level person from our office to attend a three-day P.O.S.T "Safe Driving Symposium" in San Diego and selected me to attend.

Once in San Diego, I learned that this symposium was centered around the Below 100 initiative, an effort to reduce line of duty peace officer deaths to less than 100 per year nationwide. I also learned that more cops die in vehicle-related incidents than by gunfire each year, and a majority of those deaths are attributable to excessive speed and/or not wearing a seat belt. We saw videos of cops doing preventable things like speeding, driving recklessly and not wearing their seatbelts, all captured by police dash cameras.

I knew our deputies were speeding out there, I just didn't know how to make it stop. At this training I met Kim Schlau, who lost her teenage daughters, Jessica and Kelli Uhl, when they were killed instantly after being hit head-on by an Illinois State trooper who was driving 126 mph on the freeway while using his on board computer and talking on the cell phone. It was that day I promised Kim that I would slow down our patrol cars.

When I returned to work the following Monday, I met with Sheriff Prieto and told him of what I had learned at the conference. He told me we had his full support to develop a program to reduce speed and crashes in our agency.

The first thing I looked at was our agency's seat belt policy. It was sadly lacking. I re-wrote the policy so it would be mandatory to wear one at all times, with certain tactical exceptions, and the Sheriff implemented it the next day.

I also contacted the county's risk manager and asked for information regarding how many on-duty crashes we have had in the last 10 years and how much we/they have paid out as a result. I learned that each year, for the past eight years, we averaged one crash per month, injuring 1.5 deputies each year – two of whom had to retire due to their injuries. Over the past 10 years we had spent a total in excess of \$1m on liability, property damage, workers comp, legal fees and costs to repair damage to our own patrol vehicles.

We also ran a report showing speed activations by our deputies. Our patrol car dash cameras constantly record, but when the vehicle speed hits 90 MPH, the system records the activation. We can then review the video to determine if the activation was justified and necessary. It was through this report we learned that we had 616 speed activations in the last 12 months alone. One of these was 126 mph for a deputy not even en route to a call. 90 MPH may sound like a high threshold, but Yolo County is 1180 square miles of mostly rural area, broken down into four patrol zones.

I then met with my two patrol Lieutenants and trained them on everything I had learned at the seminar. We knew we couldn't just put together a presentation, show the deputies and expect them to change. We had to devise a way to make the deputies want to be motivated to do their part in changing a culture where bad driving was the norm, not just receive training.

We utilized Below 100's Powerpoint presentation, which is accessible by Below 100 trainers on their website. This presentation includes videos of officers from around the country driving recklessly, killing themselves, fellow officers and the public. In this presentation we included our own crash stats and dash cam videos of our own deputies crashing. We showed this to the Sheriff and Undersheriff. Training started that day, November 15, 2012.

We trained all patrol deputies, detectives, Animal Services officers, Court Services deputies, coroners and anyone in our department of 240 employees who would have access to driving a county-owned vehicle. In keeping with trying to change a culture, not just provide training, we downloaded motivational posters from Below 100. We also created two of our own posters. One featured a photo of the Uhl sisters, as well as pictures of their crashed vehicle and the totaled police car. The photos were given to us by Kim Schlau. The second was of a young woman by the name of Danielle Davidson whose vehicle was struck by another vehicle on the freeway, causing it to roll four and a half times. Though she required surgeries from which she is now completely recovered, she was told by treating med staff that she would have been killed had she not been wearing a seat belt. We strategically hung these posters throughout the office so you literally could not go outside the building or to the bathroom without seeing one of these posters.

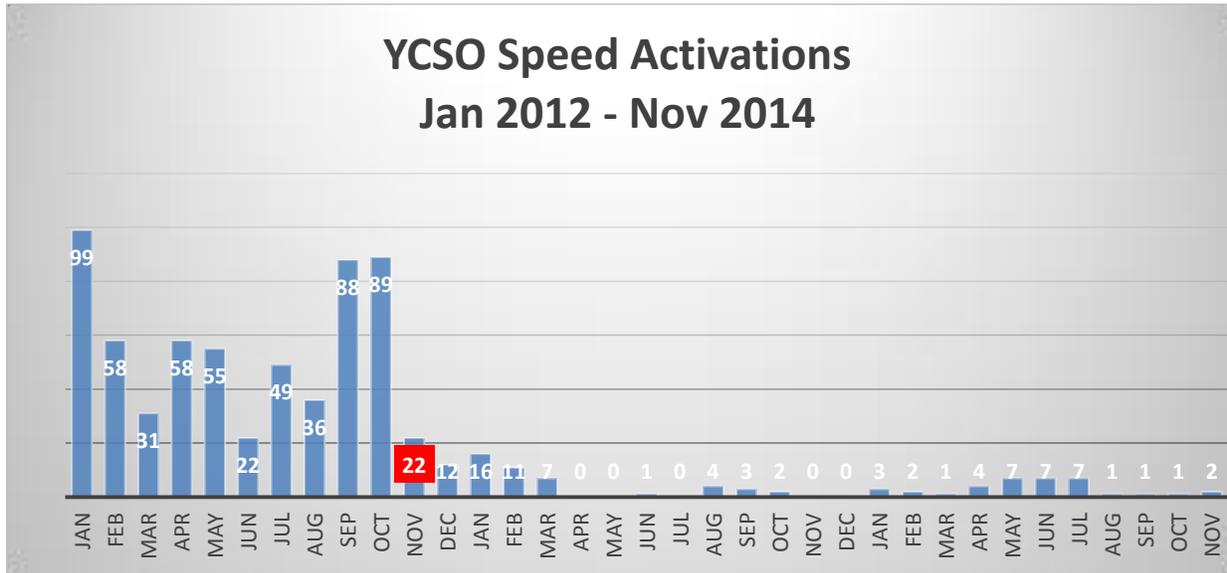
We then started to actively monitor speed activations. The deputies were ordered to narrate into the video to justify any speed activation. There are definitely acceptable speed activations; Code-3 calls, pursuits, trying to overtake vehicles and occasionally for tactical advantages where there is no exposure to public safety, but the deputy had to justify the need. We also told them it was acceptable to exceed 90 MPH, if the need was justified, they their emergency lights and siren were activated and they drove with due regard for the safety of the public.

One of our Patrol Lieutenants is responsible for reviewing all speed activations each month and then provide me a list of the unjustified ones. In the first three months after Below 100 training, unjustified speed activations dropped to 39 during that time period. Over half of the deputies dropped their activations to zero, and a majority of the remainder had two or fewer. The half who dropped to zero were rewarded with Sheriff's certificates and department challenge coins. The ones who continued to record unjustified activations were issued memorandums of counseling.

The Sheriff met with the Deputy Sheriff's Association and reminded them that this program was not designed to get anyone into trouble, but rather to keep the deputies safe by reducing our exposure to at-fault crashes. In that meeting he also reminded them that they had zero on-duty crashes since training, which equated to everyone going home safely every night since the program began.

We continued to monitor speed activations for a full year. In our first year since implementation of the training, we saw a 91% reduction in unjustified speed activations. We continued to monitor speed activations for a second year and reduced our unjustified activations by 94% of what they were before training.

**Unjustified Speed Activations  
January, 2012 – November, 2014**



The chart above reflects a 94% decrease in speed activations during the first two years after training.

The best outcome of this program was that in the 27 months since implementation of the Below 100 program, we have not had any on-duty, at-fault crashes. None.

One day, while driving on a long trip with a good friend of mine, himself a high ranking member of another agency, I started preaching about our success with the Below 100 program. He told me his agency didn't have a problem with speed activations, even though his agency was double the size of ours. I asked him if his agency had on-duty, at-fault crashes and he said, "Of course. That's the cost of doing business". Again – what I *used* to think.

He then asked, "So your cameras are set to go off at 90 miles per hour. How do you know the deputies aren't just driving everywhere at 89 miles an hour?" "I don't" I told him, "but I know they're not driving between 90 and 126 like they used to and that's saving lives and money".

**Effectiveness of Below 100 Training  
December 15, 2012 – November 15, 2014**

<b>Yolo County Sheriff's Office</b>	<b>Before Below 100 Training</b>	<b>Since Below 100 Training</b>
Average # of at-fault crashes per year	12.6	0
Average spent on bodily injury & property damage per year	\$34,011	0

Average spent on workers comp for crashes per year	\$45,057	0
Average # of Deputies seriously injured due to at-fault crashes per year	1.5	0
Average yearly spent on damage to patrol cars due to at-fault crashes	\$30,000	0
Crash-related costs saved since implementation of the program (Nov, 2012-February 2015)	\$224,991.00	

Another great feature of implementing this program is the cost. After our first year of success, Sheriff Prieto issued every patrol deputy a Certificate of Merit, with a challenge coin mounted inside, for their role in reducing on-duty crashes to zero for the first time in our department's history. To date we have spent \$900 - the costs for the paper and ink to print the posters and the safe driving certificates, and the cost of the challenge coins.

The Yolo County Sheriff's Office has become the nationwide model for success with how we implemented the Below 100 program. We are talked about at every Below 100 presentation and we have been featured in Law Officer Magazine, the California Sheriff Magazine and several other newspapers including the Los Angeles Daily News. We also receive calls from police agencies nationwide to discuss how we implemented this program and how we can help them.

There is no one individual in our agency who is solely responsible for our success in this arena. The credit for our success lies with the deputies and staff who bought into the concept of changing culture and driving responsibly to make sure that they and their fellow deputies go home safely every night.

Hopefully reading this has inspired you with some ideas of your own on how change a culture, not just provide training. We are in no way experts on this topic, but hopefully you can take a little of what worked for us and use it for the benefit of your agency.