

**RIO VISTA POLICE DEPARTMENT
2008-2009 Grand Jury Report**

REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

California Penal Code §919 subsection (b) provides: “The Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the County.” Pursuant to the statute, the 2008-2009 Grand Jury inspected the Rio Vista Police Department.

GRAND JURY ACTIONS

- Toured the Rio Vista Police Department
- Inspected the pre-booking area
- Interviewed Chief of Police
- Interviewed staff
- Contacted Dispatch Centers within Contra Costa and Solano Counties
- Contacted California Public Employee Retirement System
- Contacted City of Rio Vista Human Resources Department
- Reviewed Notice of Consent form from Solano County Sheriff’s Office

BACKGROUND/SUMMARY

The Rio Vista Police Department (RVPD) is housed in a 7,200 sq. ft. modular building that has no holding cells or facility to properly secure arrestees. They are transported to the Solano County Jail in Fairfield by police officers who have other duties. Transport to the County Jail averages one per day and involves a minimum two-hour round trip.

RVPD has an uncommon relationship with the Contra Costa County Sheriff Department. RVPD contracts for dispatch communication services with the Contra Costa County Sheriff Department Dispatch Center. As a result, the RVPD does not ordinarily communicate by radio with the Solano County Sheriff’s Office Dispatch Center. In an emergency, the officers may choose to change the car radio frequency channel to Solano County Dispatch Center or to another law enforcement agency within Solano County. When assistance is needed by the RVPD, assistance is provided by deputies from the Contra Costa County Sheriff’s Department or other agencies among Solano, Sacramento and Contra Costa Counties. However, once the RVPD officer switches frequencies he is no longer on the Contra Costa County Sheriff’s Department repeater system. When this happens, he is in a line-of-sight mode, car-to-car. If any structural or geographical barriers come between the cars, communication can be disrupted.

According to the Chief of Police, the Department is in the unique and positive situation of having every agency in Solano, Contra Costa and Sacramento Counties available to assist in emergency situations or in those situations where a single additional unit or specialized unit, might be needed. He also stated that there is no “authorization” required for any type of assistance, as there is also no need for authorization for RVPD to provide help for any of their neighboring agencies or Highway Patrol.

In a 911 emergency, the call goes to the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Dispatch Center. The Dispatch Center is on a ring down phone (*direct dedicated line*) to the Solano County Sheriff's Dispatch Center. At this point, the Solano County Sheriff's Office Dispatcher is told the type of emergency (Police or Fire) and dispatches the proper assistance.

RVPD has an insufficient number of sworn Police Officers due to an inability to retain staff, and the high cost of recruitment. As a result, the Department has an overtime pay rate of 15 to 20 percent. The current cost of recruitment is approximately \$5,000-\$6,000 per officer, which includes advertising, background checks, on-the-job training, qualifying medical, psychological and polygraph exams. New officers are eligible to receive Basic Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) Certification following a probation period of 12-18 months.

The Rio Vista Police Officers work alternate three 12-hour shifts and four 12-hour shifts every other week. According to the Chief of Police, Rio Vista Police Officers are paid at a lower rate than other comparable officers within Solano County. The Grand Jury acknowledges the fact that the RVPD does participate in the California Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) Public Safety component of PERS. However, the Grand Jury spoke with a representative from PERS and determined that RVPD is the last law enforcement agency in Solano County to still be at the 2% at 50 years of age times years of qualified service. All other law enforcement agencies are at the 3% at 50 years of age times years of qualified service level. Unlike other law enforcement agencies in Solano County, RVPD participates in the Social Security retirement system.

The RVPD has no local training facility, and Rio Vista is relatively remote from other training resources within the County. RVPD uses training facilities for firearms training in Dixon; however, they plan to use the newly constructed Fairfield facility. The driver training facility is at the California Highway Patrol Academy in West Sacramento.

The RVPD uses a Community Oriented Policing and Problem-Solving program to aid in their efforts to address crime. This typically involves Police Officers interacting with the public on a more personal basis as opposed to simply patrolling the streets of the City.

At the time of this report, the RVPD leased six patrol vehicles from Solano County at a cost of \$465 per vehicle, per month, plus \$0.61 per mile traveled. This included the maintenance of the vehicles. Fuel is an additional expense.

Facility emergency evacuation procedures are required in public buildings by State law. The emergency procedures were properly posted at the time of the inspection.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1 – Rio Vista Police Department staffing may not be sufficient for local public safety. Retention of new officers is a serious problem. Due to the relatively low rate of pay at the Rio Vista Police Department, there is little incentive for officers to remain beyond their probationary period. The cost of recruitment is high. An additional recruitment disincentive is the Rio Vista Police Department is the last law enforcement agency in Solano County to still be at the 2% at 50 years of age times years of qualified service. However, the Rio Vista Police Department participates in the Social Security retirement system.

Recommendation 1 – In order to address insufficient staffing and personnel retention issues, the City of Rio Vista should consider the following measures:

- If the Rio Vista Police Department is unable to pay a sufficient salary to attract and retain qualified police officers, the City of Rio Vista should consider contracting with the Solano County Sheriff’s Office for police services.
- The City of Rio Vista should offer the Public Safety Retirement Plan that is 3% at 50 years of age times years of qualified service to Police Officers.

Finding 2 - Ongoing training is an issue due to the lack of a local training facility and relative remoteness from training resources, which are available to other cities.

Recommendation 2 - Develop a training plan in concert with the other law enforcement departments within Solano County in order to better utilize existing training facilities within the County, such as the newly constructed firearms training facility in Fairfield. This would enhance the quality of policing throughout the County and would be a cost-saving measure for all concerned.

Finding 3 – There is no secure facility for prisoner detention in the Rio Vista Police Department. An officer who has other duties must account for a detainee until transported to Solano County Jail.

Recommendation 3 - When funds become available, a new permanent Police Facility with holding cells should be built. In the interim period, the City of Rio Vista should obtain a modular facility to detain the arrestees that meets the current required standards for detainees.

Finding 4 – The policy of leasing police vehicles was selected prior to the current economic downturn and may no longer be cost-effective.

Recommendation 4 – The Rio Vista Police Department should review and compare the cost of leasing, versus owning, police vehicles to determine which would be most cost-effective.

Finding 5 – Currently, the City of Rio Vista Police Department routinely requests assistance from Contra Costa County Sheriff’s Office. In order for the Rio Vista Police Department Officers to request assistance from outside of Solano County, this assistance must be authorized by the Sheriff of Solano County (see the attached Notice of Consent form from the Solano County Sheriff/Coroner; per California Penal Code §830.1-Designation of Peace Officers - Scope of Authority). Even though the Rio Vista Police Department is **able** to communicate with other law enforcement agencies via car-to-car communications, the process appears cumbersome. Because the Rio Vista Police Department is currently dispatched through the Contra Costa County Sheriff’s Office, any request for assistance from agencies within Contra Costa County must be made through their dispatch center. The Contra Costa County Dispatcher then must telephonically contact the Solano County Sheriff Dispatcher. Requests for assistance may have a time delay.

Recommendation 5 - Rio Vista Police Department should establish the ability to communicate via radio directly with all law enforcement agencies within Solano County. This can be accomplished by contracting for radio services with the Solano County Sheriff’s Office. This could enhance safety and service for both law enforcement officers and the citizens of Rio Vista.

COMMENTS

The current Grand Jury repeats a recommendation made by prior Grand Juries: The City should provide a minimum of one holding cell at the Police Department.

As it currently stands, all 911 requests are routed through the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Department. The process now is for the dispatcher in Contra Costa County to pick up the ring down phone to the Solano County Dispatcher. While the time delay in oral communication may not be significant, there are other issues. The main barrier is the Sacramento River. In order for help to come to the Rio Vista Police Department, that help must cross the Rio Vista Bridge via Highway 12. The bridge is a drawbridge, raised at various unknown times throughout a 24-hour period. This could result in a significant time delay. However, in Solano County, you do not have to cross a bridge, and there are alternative routes available for the Rio Vista Police Department to receive assistance. The resulting time delay could compromise the safety of both the citizens and public safety personnel of the City of Rio Vista.

The recommendations made by this Grand Jury are an effort to assist in the modernization of police services required by the demands of a continually growing community.

RESPONDING AND AFFECTED PARTIES

Rio Vista Police Department
Rio Vista City Manager
Rio Vista City Council
Solano County Sheriff's Office

COURTESY COPY

Solano County Supervisor, District 5
Commission on Police Officers Standard Training
Fairfield Police Department
Sacramento County – Sheriff's Office
Contra Costa County – Sheriff's Department