

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

Audit and Accountability Bureau



Vehicle Pursuits Audit
Patrol Operations



Alex Villanueva, Sheriff

Project No. 2020-8-A

October 27, 2020

LOS ANGELES COUNTY SHERIFF'S DEPARTMENT
Audit and Accountability Bureau

VEHICLE PURSUITS AUDIT
PATROL OPERATIONS
Project No. 2020-8-A
AUDIT REPORT

PURPOSE

The Audit and Accountability Bureau (AAB) conducted the Vehicle Pursuits Audit – Patrol Operations under the authority of the Sheriff of Los Angeles County. The audit was performed to determine how the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's Patrol Operations stations adhered to the Manual of Policy and Procedures (MPP) vehicle pursuit requirements.

The AAB conducted this audit under the guidance of Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards.¹ The AAB determined the evidence obtained was sufficient and appropriate to provide reasonable assurance of the results based on the audit objectives.

BACKGROUND

The Department and the County of Los Angeles are exposed to significant risks when Department members actively attempt to stop a suspect in a vehicle pursuit. Comprehensive reviews of vehicle pursuits allow the Department to increase its capacity to mitigate liability concerns which may arise during vehicle pursuits. According to the 2016-2017 Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury Final Report, vehicle pursuits pose a potential risk of injury or death to officers and innocent bystanders.²

In order to effectively manage vehicle pursuits, the Department requires several concurrent procedures to take place at the onset and throughout the operation. The MPP requires that there be constant communication between the involved deputies, the Sheriff's Communication Center (SCC) dispatcher, and watch commander. The flow of information bolsters management's ability to make sound decisions and to coordinate necessary additional resources, such as Aero Bureau units which are required to respond to each pursuit. These units are an invaluable resource during each pursuit.³

The Department also requires management to evaluate pursuits objectively and comprehensively. Following a pursuit, it is the responsibility of the watch commander in command of the pursuit to ensure the operation is fully debriefed, assess the

¹ United States Government Accountability Office, Government Auditing Standards, July 2018.

² 2016-2017 Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury Final Report, pp. 143-162.

³ MPP §5-09/210.10, Control of a Pursuit, May 2020

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performance and tactics utilized, consider strategies which may be improved in future pursuits, and to create training materials for station personnel.⁴

At the conclusion of the pursuit, the unit commander is responsible for evaluating the pursuit to determine if the conduct of the pursuing deputies was within Department policy, and if the tactics used were consistent with Department training. If the pursuit or tactics are deemed out of policy, management must take a proactive approach toward addressing the deficiencies.

In its efforts to uphold lawful, professional, and ethical standards, the Department has incorporated many of the standards from the Peace Officer Standards and Training California Law Enforcement Vehicle Pursuit Guidelines into its policies:⁵

Policy Governing Pursuits

It is the policy of the Sheriff's Department that pursuits are permitted only when the necessity of immediate apprehension outweighs the degree of danger created by the pursuit, and only when in compliance with this policy and applicable state laws.

The purpose of this policy is to secure a balance between protecting the public against personal injury, death, or property damage and law enforcement's duty to enforce the law and apprehend violators. It is also intended to provide guidance for the management, control, and tactics associated with pursuit operations as required by state law. Since there are numerous situations which arise in law enforcement that are unique, it is impossible for this policy or any standard operating procedure to anticipate all possible circumstances. Therefore, this policy is intended to direct as well as guide a sworn member's discretion in matters of vehicular pursuits.

Initiating Deputies, Supervisors, and Watch Commanders engaged in any pursuit operation will be responsible for providing the Unit Commander objective reasons for initiating, continuing, and terminating a vehicle pursuit. Consideration must be given to the extent of danger the suspect poses to the public beyond the act of evasion itself.⁶

⁴ MPP §5-09/210.30, Pursuit Evaluation and Reporting, November 2018.

⁵ California Law Enforcement Vehicle Pursuit Guidelines, California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, Published December 1995, Revised February 2007.

⁶ MPP §5-09/210.00, Pursuits, December 2013.

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PRIOR AUDITS

The AAB conducted one similar audit regarding vehicle pursuits, specifically management's evaluation of vehicle pursuits. The Vehicle Pursuit Evaluation Audit, No. 2018-2-A, was completed on June 20, 2018.

METHODOLOGY

Scope

The Department defines a vehicle pursuit as an active attempt by the driver of a Department vehicle to stop a moving vehicle whose driver is attempting to avoid apprehension through evasive driving tactics or, after a reasonable short period of time, fails to stop after red light and siren have been activated.⁷

The audit included the following four objectives to determine whether vehicle pursuits were properly managed and evaluated:

- Objective No. 1 – Initiation of a Pursuit: To determine if deputies initiated pursuits under appropriate conditions and if they articulated objective reasons for the pursuit in cases where they were initiated under the premise of a possible crime.
- Objective No. 2 – Control of a Pursuit: To determine if the pursuing deputies, dispatchers, and supervisors appropriately controlled the pursuit.
- Objective No. 3 – Aero Bureau Responsibilities: To determine if Aero Bureau personnel provided the required information when engaged in the pursuit.
- Objective No. 4 – Pursuit Evaluation and Reporting: To determine if management properly evaluated and reported each pursuit.

The audit included an evaluation of vehicle pursuit packages which were reviewed and approved by the respective station's unit commander. A Vehicle Pursuit package typically consists of a Department Pursuit Evaluation form (SH-R-454), a memorandum from the watch commander articulating the details of the pursuit and the subsequent actions taken, an Incident Report (SH-R-49), a Traffic Collision Report (CHP 555) if applicable, a copy of the respective "in-service" roster, and any corresponding multimedia files. Audio files include recordings of radio transmissions by the

⁷ MPP §5-09/210.00, Pursuits, December 2013.

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participating deputies, the Aero Bureau personnel, the SCC dispatcher, and the “cold line” communication between the watch commander and the SCC.⁸

Audit Time Period

The audit time period was July 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019.

Audit Population

The audit population consisted of all vehicle pursuits engaged in by Patrol Operations personnel from July 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019. During that time period, the Department’s Patrol Operations engaged in 221 pursuits. Auditors selected a statistically valid random sample of 77 vehicle pursuits for review.⁹

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⁸ A “cold line” is a telephonic communication between the station’s watch commander and the SCC which is not broadcasted over the radio.

⁹ Using a statistical one-tail test with a 95% confidence level and a 4% error rate, a statistically valid sample was identified.

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AUDIT OBJECTIVES AND RESULTS

Objective No. 1 – Initiation of a Pursuit

Objective No. 1(a) – Initiation Conditions

Criteria

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.02, Initiation of a Pursuit, (May 2019), states:

A pursuit may be initiated under the following conditions:

- *Known or suspected serious felony suspect(s):*

Note: *“Serious felony” as used in this section includes: the attempt or act of murder, mayhem, serious or violent sex crimes, robbery, arson, kidnapping, carjacking, assault with a deadly weapon, burglary (including commercial burglary that results in significant loss or is determined to be part of a serial crime), major narcotics violations, and terrorist acts...*

- *A confirmed grand theft, vehicle; or*
- *Misdemeanor suspects only in the following situations:*
 - *Where the suspect(s) has been observed by a deputy or reliable witness(s) to be displaying a firearm in an assaultive manner reasonably contemporaneous to the initiation of the pursuit; or*
 - *Where there is reasonable suspicion to believe the suspect is driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, or is otherwise impaired, and the suspect’s driving prior to the attempted stop is so flagrantly reckless that it presents a clear and present danger to other users of the highway, and failure to apprehend the violator would likely pose an imminent and life threatening danger to the public...*

Procedures

Auditors obtained and reviewed the applicable 77 vehicle pursuit packages to determine whether each vehicle pursuit was initiated under appropriate conditions.

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Results

All 77 vehicle pursuits (100%) met the criteria for this objective. The following table shows the reasons for initiating vehicle pursuits and their frequency:

Table No. 1 – Reasons for Initiation of Vehicle Pursuits

Reason for Initiation	Frequency
Reckless DUI	34
Stolen Vehicle	28
Burglary	5
Assault with a Deadly Weapon	2
Robbery	2
Attempted Murder	1
Brandishing a Firearm	1
Carjacking	1
Felony Armed and Dangerous	1
Kidnapping	1
Shooting at Inhabited Dwelling	1
TOTAL	77

Objective No. 1(b) – Possible Crime Follow-Up

Criteria

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.10, Control of a Pursuit, Primary Unit Responsibility, (May 2020)¹⁰, states:

Any time a pursuit is initiated due to a “possible” crime, including reckless driving under the influence (DUI), personnel shall be required, subsequent to the pursuit, to articulate to the watch commander the objective criteria which led them to believe the suspect(s) was involved in criminal activity which warranted initiation of a pursuit under this policy...

¹⁰ The most current policies from May 2020, May 2019, and November 2018 were utilized for purposes of this report. Previous versions were last updated or revised on December 12, 2013. The previous versions were materially similar to the current versions and did not affect the outcome of this audit.

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Procedures

Auditors compiled a population of 77 vehicle pursuits that were engaged in by Patrol Operations deputies during the audit time period. Of the 77 vehicle pursuits, 49 were initiated due to a “possible” crime. Auditors reviewed the watch commander’s vehicle pursuit memorandum and corresponding Incident Reports to determine if the pursuing deputy articulated the objective criteria which led them to believe the suspect was involved in criminal activity.

Results

All 49 (100%) vehicle pursuits met the criteria.

Objective No. 1(c) – Field Sobriety Tests

Criteria

The Department does not have a policy requiring deputies to conduct field sobriety tests at the conclusion of vehicle pursuits that were initiated under the premise that the suspect was driving under the influence. However, according to Department management, the best and common practices of the Department make field sobriety tests an expectation in most instances.¹¹

Procedures

Auditors compiled a population of 77 vehicle pursuits that were engaged in by Patrol Operations deputies during the audit time period. Thirty-three vehicle pursuits were initiated under the suspicion of a possible suspect driving under the influence. Seventeen of the 33 resulted in the apprehension of the suspect. Auditors reviewed the watch commander’s vehicle pursuit memorandum and corresponding Incident Reports to determine if a field sobriety test was administered.

Results

Sixteen of the 17 (94%) vehicle pursuits met the criteria. One pursuit package did not indicate that a field sobriety test was conducted.

¹¹ The criteria used for Objective No. 1(c) meets the suitability standards for criteria as defined by §8.17 and §8.18 of the United States Government Accountability Office, Government Auditing Standards, July 2018. Suitable criteria are relevant, reliable, objective, and understandable and may include expert opinions from Department resources.

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Objective No. 2 – Control of a Pursuit

Objective No. 2(a) – Primary Unit Responsibility

Criteria

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.10, Control of a Pursuit, Primary Unit Responsibility, (May 2020), states:

The Deputy initiating a pursuit is the primary unit and shall, in all cases, immediately provide the station/unit watch commander with the following information through the Sheriff's Communications Center (SCC):

- *Unit identification;*
- *Location, speed, and direction of travel;*
- *The specific reason for the pursuit, including known laws violated;*
- *Vehicle description, including license number, if known;*
- *Number of occupants;*
- *Traffic conditions, including the description of any hazardous driving by the suspect, and*
- *Any information concerning the use of firearms or other officer safety factors when present...*

Procedures

Auditors compiled a population of 77 vehicle pursuits that were engaged in by Patrol Operations personnel during the audit time period. Seventy-four vehicle pursuits met the criteria for review. Two pursuits were broadcasted entirely by Aero Bureau personnel, and one pursuit ended immediately after the pursuit was initiated. Auditors obtained and reviewed audio files to determine if the deputy initiating the pursuit broadcasted the required information.

Results

Sixty-seven of the 74 (91%) vehicle pursuits met the criteria. Seven vehicle pursuits did not include a broadcast of the required information. Five pursuits did not broadcast the traffic conditions, one did not broadcast the speed, and one did not broadcast the number of occupants inside the vehicle.

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Objective No. 2(b) – Sheriff’s Communications Center Responsibility

Criteria

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.10, Control of a Pursuit, SCC Responsibility, (May 2020), states:

...The SCC dispatcher will immediately activate the duplex patch and advise the primary unit of the identity and location of back-up units in position to assist. SCC shall immediately request an Aero Bureau unit...

Procedures

Auditors compiled a population of 77 vehicle pursuits that were engaged in by Patrol Operations personnel during the audit time period. Seventy-six vehicle pursuits met the criteria for review. One pursuit ended immediately after the pursuit was initiated. Auditors obtained and reviewed audio files to determine if the SCC dispatcher activated the duplex patch and broadcasted the required information.

Results

All 76 (100%) vehicle pursuits met the criteria.

Objective No. 2(c) – Supervisory Responsibility – Field Sergeant

Criteria

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.10, Control of a Pursuit, Supervisory Responsibility, Field Sergeant, (May 2020), states:

The field sergeant of the initiating unit, or the unit assisting an outside agency, shall acknowledge and actively monitor the pursuit...

Procedures

Auditors compiled a population of 77 vehicle pursuits that were engaged in by Patrol Operations personnel during the audit time period. Auditors obtained and reviewed audio files to determine if the field sergeant acknowledged and actively monitored the pursuit. Seventy-one vehicle pursuits met the criteria for review. The duration of six vehicle pursuits were approximately one minute and were excluded for evaluation as field sergeants did not have a sufficient amount of time to acknowledge.

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Results

Sixty-nine of the 71 (97%) vehicle pursuits met the criteria. Two pursuits did not have a field sergeant acknowledge the pursuit over the radio.

Objective No. 2(d) – Supervisor Responsibility – Watch Commander

Criteria

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.10, Control of a Pursuit, Supervisory Responsibility – Watch Commander, (May 2020) states:

The watch commander shall respond to the desk area and immediately take command. In order to maintain operational command and control, the watch commander, either directly or through subordinate personnel, shall establish “cold line” communications with the SCC watch sergeant, who shall immediately and directly carry out the orders of the watch commander...

Procedures

Auditors compiled a population of 77 vehicle pursuits that were engaged in by Patrol Operations personnel during the audit time period. Auditors obtained and reviewed audio files to determine if the watch commander responded to the desk area in order to maintain operational command and control and established a “cold line” communication with the SCC.

Results

Seventy-four of the 77 (96%) vehicle pursuits met the criteria. Watch commanders did not establish a “cold line” during three of the vehicle pursuits.

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Objective No. 3 – Aero Bureau Responsibilities

Criteria

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.12, Aero Bureau Responsibility, (May 2020), states:

An Aero Bureau unit shall attempt to become involved in every pursuit initiated by this Department or conducted in the Sheriff's Department's patrol jurisdiction. This Aero Bureau unit shall be under the command of the station/unit watch commander, who has overall responsibility for the pursuit...

At the time of initial visual contact and before engaging in the vehicle pursuit, the Aero Bureau unit shall broadcast:

- *The total number of ground units visibly involved;*
- *The estimated vehicle speeds and traffic conditions; and*
- *When conditions permit, the Aero Bureau unit shall broadcast the rooftop numbers of all involved units...*

Procedures

Auditors compiled a population of 77 vehicle pursuits that were engaged in by Patrol Operations personnel during the audit time period. Auditors obtained and reviewed audio files to determine if the responding Aero Bureau unit broadcasted the required information upon engaging in the vehicle pursuit. Aero Bureau units became involved in 17 vehicle pursuits; therefore, 17 vehicle pursuits were evaluated for this objective.

Results

Sixteen of the 17 (94%) vehicle pursuits met the criteria. One Aero Bureau unit did not broadcast the number of involved ground units.

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Objective No. 4 – Pursuit Evaluation and Reporting

Objective No. 4(a) – Debriefing

Criteria

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.30, Pursuit Evaluation and Reporting, (November 2018), states:

Following a pursuit, it shall be the responsibility of the watch commander supervising the pursuit to ensure that the pursuit operation is fully debriefed. This debriefing will be conducted to assess the performance and tactics utilized, strategies which may be improved in future pursuits, and create training materials for other personnel. This debriefing may be conducted by the field sergeant and discussed with the watch commander, who shall document the debriefing in a memorandum to the unit commander...

Procedures

Auditors compiled a population of 77 vehicle pursuits that were engaged in by Patrol Operations personnel during the audit time period. Auditors obtained and reviewed the watch commanders' vehicle pursuit memoranda to determine if each vehicle pursuit was debriefed.

Results

Seventy-five of the 77 (97%) vehicle pursuits met the criteria. One vehicle pursuit memorandum did not indicate that each participant was debriefed. The second pursuit package was completed subsequent to the audit time period. Therefore, auditors did not review the vehicle pursuit packet pertaining to this objective.

Objective No. 4(b) – Unit Commander Review

Criteria

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.30, Pursuit Evaluation and Reporting, (November 2018), states:

...The unit commander charged with command responsibility for the Sheriff's vehicle engaged in the pursuit shall review the Department Pursuit Evaluation form. The purpose of the unit commander's review is to determine if the pursuit was within Department policy and whether the pursuit was properly managed.

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If the pursuit involved personnel not assigned to a patrol station, a copy of the completed form shall be sent to the involved personnel's unit commander for review;...

Procedures

Auditors compiled a population of 77 vehicle pursuits that were engaged in by Patrol Operations personnel during the audit time period. Auditors obtained and reviewed Pursuit Evaluation forms to determine if they were reviewed by the unit commander.

Results

Seventy-four of the 77 (96%) Pursuit Evaluation forms met the criteria. Three Pursuit Evaluation forms were not reviewed by the unit commander in a timely manner. One was reviewed 11 months after the vehicle pursuit, one was submitted subsequent to the audit time period, and auditors could not determine if a unit commander reviewed a third.

Objective No. 4(c) – Traffic Services Detail

Criteria

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.30, Pursuit Evaluation and Reporting, (November 2018), states:

...In all cases, the unit commander shall cause the Department Pursuit Evaluation form to be submitted to the Traffic Services Detail within 15 business days;...

Procedures

Auditors compiled a population of 77 vehicle pursuits that were engaged in by Patrol Operations personnel during the audit time period. Auditors obtained and reviewed Pursuit Evaluation forms and a Traffic Services Detail (TSD) vehicle pursuit tracker to determine if the Pursuit Evaluation forms were submitted within 15 business days.

Results

Thirty-seven of the 77 (48%) Pursuit Evaluation forms submitted to the TSD met the criteria. Twenty-three were never submitted to the TSD, while 17 were submitted after the 15 business day time limit.

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SUMMARY OF AUDIT RESULTS

The audit yielded the following results:

Table No. 2 - Summary of Audit Results

Objective No.	Audit Objectives	Met the Criteria
1	PURSUIT INITIATION	
1(a)	<i>Initiation of a Pursuit</i>	100%
1(b)	<i>Possible Crime Follow-up</i>	100%
1(c)	<i>Field Sobriety Tests</i>	94%
2	CONTROL OF A PURSUIT	
2(a)	<i>Primary Unit Responsibility</i>	91%
2(b)	<i>Sheriff's Communications Center Responsibility</i>	100%
2(c)	<i>Supervisory Responsibility – Field Sergeant</i>	97%
2(d)	<i>Supervisory Responsibility – Watch Commander</i>	96%
3	AERO BUREAU RESPONSIBILITIES	
3	<i>Aero Bureau Responsibilities</i>	94%
4	PURSUIT EVALUATION AND REPORTING	
4(a)	<i>Debriefing</i>	97%
4(b)	<i>Unit Commander Review</i>	96%
4(c)	<i>Traffic Services Detail</i>	48%

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OTHER RELATED MATTERS

Other related matters are pertinent issues discovered during the audit, but were not objectives which were measurable against Department policies and procedures.

Vehicle Pursuit Reporting Deficiencies

As shown in Objective No. 4(d), patrol stations have inconsistently notified the TSD of their vehicle pursuits. The MPP’s notification policy was designed to ensure that the TSD has sufficient time to report the Department’s vehicle pursuits to the California Highway Patrol (CHP), as required by the California Vehicle Code.¹² Less than half of the vehicle pursuits engaged in by patrol stations were reported to the TSD.

Station personnel do not have a consistent understanding of the notification policy as several personnel believe that only pursuits that result in a traffic collision are required to be reported to the TSD. One source of this confusion may be the Pursuit Evaluation Form notification section. All vehicle pursuits are required, by policy, to be reported to the TSD. As shown in Figure No. 1 below, the pursuit evaluation form contradicts the policy by giving an option to not report a vehicle pursuit.

Figure No. 1 – Pursuit Evaluation Form Notifications Section

Notifications (when required by policy)						
Sheriff's HQ Bureau	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No	Person notified	<input type="text"/>	Date	<input type="text"/>
Traffic Services Detail	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No	Person notified	<input type="text"/>	Date	<input type="text"/>
Internal Affairs Bureau	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="radio"/> No	Person notified	<input type="text"/>	Date	<input type="text"/>

Another impediment in the Department’s ability to report vehicle pursuits to the TSD in a timely manner is the managerial review process. The current review process requires the vehicle pursuit package to flow from either a watch sergeant or a watch commander up the chain of command to the respective Division Chief and back. This process often takes several months to complete. It is only at this point that the Pursuit Evaluation form is sent to TSD, if at all. According to the TSD, an approved vehicle pursuit package is not necessary in order to report the relevant data to the State.

The AAB could not conduct a review of the TSD’s reporting to the State due to the fact that the TSD does not track the date the information was submitted to the CHP. According to TSD personnel, the database used to track vehicle pursuits is antiquated,

¹² California Vehicle Code §14602.1(a) states, “Every state and local law enforcement agency, including, but not limited to, city police departments and county sheriff’s offices, shall report to the Department of California Highway Patrol, on a paper or electronic form developed by the Department of the California Highway Patrol, all motor vehicle pursuit data.”

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making adjustments to it not feasible. The TSD performs an annual reconciliation of the vehicle pursuits entered into the Station Bureau Administration Portal to the data that they receive throughout the year to determine which pursuits have not been reported to them. Quarterly reconciliations could be an effective internal control to prevent a lapse in reporting. However, TSD personnel stated that additional reconciliation efforts would be onerous at their current staffing levels.

Watch Commander Pursuit Evaluation

The Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.30, Pursuit Evaluation and Reporting, (November 2018), states:

...The watch commander shall also complete the Department Pursuit Evaluation form (SH-R-454) and immediately submit the form to the unit commander for review;...

The Department policy governing watch commander reviews does not offer a specific time requirement for the Pursuit Evaluation form submission. However, auditors obtained and reviewed Pursuit Evaluation forms to determine the number of days that it took for the forms to be submitted. The following table is a summary of that analysis:

Table No. 3 – Days Until Pursuit Evaluation Submission

Days Until Submission	Number of Evaluations
0-2	44
3 – 15	16
16 – 30	6
31 – 60	4
61 – 90	3
90 – 180	1
180+	2
Unable to Determine	1
TOTAL	77

Pursuit Packet Checklists

Auditors noted that several stations use checklists as cover sheets for their vehicle pursuit packets. Checklists are highly effective internal controls used to ensure that critical items are not missed. However, the checklists are not uniform across Patrol Operations. A standard checklist that conforms to each requirement and is used across each station may enhance its efficacy.

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Spike Strip Deployment Records

Deputies must have been trained in the use of spike strips prior to deploying the device during a vehicle pursuit. Deputies deployed spike strips in two of the vehicle pursuits from the selected sample. The corresponding pursuit packets did not indicate which specific deputy actually deployed the spike strips. Due to the inherent risks involved in implementing pursuit ending technologies, management should properly document its usage, participants included.

Aero Bureau – Rooftop Numbers Broadcast

Manual of Policy and Procedures, Section 5-09/210.12, Aero Bureau Responsibility, (May 2020) states:

At the time of initial visual contact and before engaging in the vehicle pursuit, the Aero Bureau unit shall broadcast:...

- *When conditions permit, the Aero Bureau unit shall broadcast the rooftop numbers of all involved units.*

The current Aero Bureau Responsibility policy requires that personnel broadcast rooftop numbers whenever feasible. This may represent a redundant control as policy already requires Aero Bureau personnel to broadcast the number of engaged ground units in addition to the back-up units broadcasting their presence in the pursuit.¹³ Broadcasting rooftop numbers may represent an inefficient use of valuable airtime. Aero Bureau personnel assisted in 17 of the vehicle pursuits reviewed in this audit. Auditors noted that Aero Bureau personnel did not broadcast the rooftop numbers of the involved units in all 17.

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¹³ MPP §5-09/210.10, Control of a Pursuit, May 2020.

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Traffic Collisions

Vehicle pursuits are inherently dangerous operations. One major risk is that of a traffic collision involving a deputy, the fleeing suspect, a member of the public, or any combination thereof. Using the sample of 77 vehicle pursuits, auditors gathered the following data regarding traffic collisions:

- Twenty-one of the 77 (27%) vehicle pursuits in the sample resulted in a traffic collision.
- Each traffic collision involved the fleeing suspect.
 - 5 Traffic collisions involved Department personnel.
 - 1 traffic collision involved a rolling patrol vehicle pinning a deputy and a suspect against a parked civilian vehicle.
 - 8 traffic collisions involved a civilian vehicle.
- The 21 traffic collisions resulted in 11 persons injured.
 - 7 suspect injuries.
 - 2 deputy injuries.
 - 2 civilian injuries.
- None were fatal.

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CONCLUSION

The AAB auditors performed analyses and made assessments to identify areas that need improvement. The evidence presented provides reasonable assurance that Department personnel are adhering to vehicle pursuit review and reporting policies and procedures.

RECOMMENDATIONS

When Departmental policies and procedures are not adhered to, it results in an increased risk to the Department. Department management should disseminate the results of this audit to its personnel. Additionally, as best practice, Department management is encouraged to conduct recurring and ongoing briefing of the policies and procedures where issues were noted during the audit. The AAB considers the results of this audit to be a helpful management tool and therefore, makes the following recommendations:

1. Management should consider formalizing a policy that requires deputies to perform a field sobriety test at the conclusion of vehicle pursuits that were initiated under the suspicion that the subject was driving under the influence. (Objective No. 1)
2. In order to facilitate compliance with the California Vehicle Code, it is recommended that management implement effective internal controls to ensure that each vehicle pursuit is reported to the Traffic Services Detail. Internal controls such as using updated Pursuit Evaluation forms, uniform checklists that conform to all requirements, regular reconciliations of reported vehicle pursuits, and more robust record keeping may represent effective internal controls. (Objective No. 4, Other Related Matters)
3. Management should clarify the time period that watch commanders have to complete and submit the Department Pursuit Evaluation form to the unit commander. Policy should clearly state expectations. (Other Related Matters)
4. The current Aero Bureau Responsibility policy may contain redundant and inefficient internal controls. It is recommended that management review this policy. (Other Related Matters)

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Views of Responsible Officials

On October 9, 2020, the Patrol Operations submitted a formal response to the AAB concurring with the audit results. A copy of the audit report was provided to the Office of Inspector General.

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This audit was submitted on this 27th day of October 2020, by the Audit and Accountability Bureau.

Original signature on file at AAB

KENNETH DIAZ
Project Manager, Law Enforcement Auditor
Audit and Accountability Bureau
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

Original signature on file at AAB

JOSEPH F. DOMINGUEZ
Assistant Project Manager, Sergeant
Audit and Accountability Bureau
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

Original signature on file at AAB

M. ROWENA NELSON
Head Compliance Officer
Audit and Accountability Bureau
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

Original signature on file at AAB

RODNEY K. MOORE
Captain
Audit and Accountability Bureau
Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department