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Ellensburg
Police
Department

ELLENSBURG POLICE DEPARTMENT 2024 ANNUAL REPORT

Serving with Pride, Compassion and Excellence.

2024 Ellensburg Police Department Annual Report

Introduction

The Ellensburg Police Department (EPD) is committed to maintaining public safety, fostering community partnerships, and ensuring a high quality of life for our residents. In 2024, we continued to meet the evolving needs of our community through innovative programs, dedicated service, and a commitment to transparency and accountability. This report highlights the department's key achievements, initiatives, and challenges over the past year. You will also notice this year's report is in a different format, focused on providing the council with a deeper understanding of the challenges we face and the programs we are developing.

There have been several changes in 2024, with personnel and their assignments, the implementation of evidence-based policing and analytics, and our community education processes. It was also a year to focus on the needs of the youth in our community. With the increase in juvenile crime, we saw in 2023, the increased gang influence, and the need for a better understanding of the issue, we brought together partners and resources we hope will improve the problem.

We also researched and developed programs to reduce the community's reliance on police intervention involving non-criminal matters.

We look forward to seeing what success these and other programs have on improving the safety in our community.

2024 in review.

- Commitment to Public Safety - Partnerships - Improving the quality of life.
- Developing innovative programs to reduce and prevent crime.
- Employee alignment through retirement, promotions and hiring.
- Educating our community through improved communications/presentations.
- Aligning our efforts towards community priorities.
- Refining and utilizing data to efficiently guide our proactive work.

Personnel and Departmental Changes

Employee Changes: This year marked significant changes in personnel within the department.

- Captain Dan Hansberry retired after 30 years of service.
- Officer John Hindmarch joined the department.
- Code Enforcement Officer Theresa Jones left the department.
- Officer Derek Holmes transferred back to patrol.
- Sgt. Tim Weed took over detective supervision, with Taylor Malmstrom and Jason Ramsey joining as detectives.

Promotions:

- Kliff Caillier was promoted to sergeant.
- Ryan Potter was promoted to corporal, then sergeant.
- Christian Alviar promoted to corporal.
- Cameron Clasen was promoted to Administrative Captain.

Awards:

- Officer Stephanie Druktenis received Officer of the Year in recognition of her commitment to professional development and service to the department.
- Sergeant Josh Bender received the Chief's Award for contributions to community events.
- Records Clerk Cammie Dixon-Ricard received the Chief's Award for contributions to Child safety through the Child Safety Restraint Program

Re-Accreditation: The Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs is the governing body responsible for accreditation of law enforcement agencies in Washington to include state, local and tribal entities. Each year, accredited agencies are required to provide proof of practices on selected topics. Every four years accredited agencies undergo an extensive evaluation by outside auditors to include an on-sight inspection and interview of employees. 2024 was EPD's full inspection year. Again, for the 3rd consecutive full evaluation, we were in full compliance with no negative finding.

Department Overview:

Patrol Division:

- 16,018 incident reports filed (5% decrease from 2023).
- 684 collisions investigated (8% increase).
- 3,131 traffic stops were conducted.
- Two vacancies throughout the year.

Detectives Division:

- Fully staffed with five detectives and one sergeant.
- 232 cases were investigated, including nine employee background checks.

School Resource Officer (SRO):

- Our School Resource Officer works closely with the Ellensburg School District Staff to strengthen school safety and student relationships by providing a safe environment for learning.

Records Division:

- 1,384 Public Disclosure Requests processed.
- 183 court orders and 471 warrants entered.

Code Enforcement:

- 2,978 parking violations, 252 weed violations, 14 snow and ice violations addressed.
- Addison Johnson managed operations after the departure of Thresa Jones.

Animal Control:

- 32 dog bites, four animal cruelty investigations, and 662 animal complaints handled.
- Continued partnership with Yakima Humane Society.

Crime and Intelligence Analysis:

Crime and Intelligence Analyst – This is the newest component of the department, focused on our mission to reduce crime and improve the quality of life in Ellensburg utilizing scientific analysis. We're working to develop programs, and analyze problems, to support our evidence-based policing model. This function gives the department the ability to research new and existing programs, that improves the quality of life and mitigates the impact of crime in our community.

Handle with care, CHASE Program, Data collection & reporting, Graffiti Abatement, High Density Residential Program, Gang intelligence, Strategic Messaging Program, Yearly community survey, CWU Internships.

Areas of Interest:

Mental Health: Mental health impacts almost every aspect of community safety across this country and Ellensburg is no exception. Ellensburg Police are not counselors, and our primary responsibility is community safety, but we do play a significant role in the mental health services offered in Ellensburg. Most people experiencing mental health challenges can manage it themselves or with the assistance of family or loved ones through local service providers. However, there are instances where mental health becomes a crisis, unmanageable by the individual or those there to assist. This is where law enforcement becomes involved. Police are often the initial contact with those in crisis. Working closely with those in the mental health profession, officers assist in notification and referring individual Comprehensive Mental Health services.

- In 2015, the Ellensburg Police Department made 171 mental health referrals. During calendar year 2024 that number has increased to 497, a 191% increase over 10 years and is continuing to grow.

There is also some good news involving mental health.

- In 2018, the department responded to 148 suicidal calls, our highest number in the last 10 years. During 2024, that number was 96, a 35% decrease.
- Calls involving a suicide attempt, where officers found evidence that an actual effort to commit suicide occurred has also decreased dramatically in 2024, with only 14 calls, down from 2015 where we experienced 47 attempts, a 70% reduction.
- Since 2020, we average only 1 suicide death per year.

Substance Abuse: Drugs have ravaged our community for many years and unfortunately will likely continue, but there has been some improvement.

- During 2024 the city of Ellensburg did not have a single reported controlled substance overdose death, zero. Having experienced the most overdose deaths in 2023, with 9, this is great news.
- We had a 48% increase in enforcement activities with the re-criminalization of possession of drugs, in 2024, which may have played a minor role in this decrease in deaths, but certainly not a significant influence.
- Officers responded to 16 non-fatal drug overdoses with the youngest being 17 months old. This is consistent with 2023 totals.
- We attribute the wide distribution and use of the drug Naloxone (NARCAN), an opioid blocking medication which reverses the effects of the overdose.
 - Officers began carrying Naloxone in 2019 and during 2024 they administered the medication approximately 6 times.
 - Often officers find empty Naloxone containers at the scene of overdoses and have been told that many, if not most, people addicted to Fentanyl have overdosed but with the availability of Naloxone their friends or families have saved them.
 - Beginning in October of 2024, the police department was approved to participate in the Washington State Department of Health Leave-Behind program. This program provides Naloxone to EMS organizations to leave with individuals and family members of those likely to observe an overdose. Since October, we have provided 8 doses to individuals.

Drug Environment in Ellensburg: Fentanyl and methamphetamine continue to be the primary illegal drug consumed in Ellensburg. Fentanyl first showed up in Ellensburg in 2018 but did not see wide acceptance in the drug community until late 2019, early 2020. At that time Fentanyl was distributed in pill form. Heroin was still widely available, and I estimate was being used by 60 – 70% of opioid users. That all changed in 2021 when we experienced 39 overdoses with the deaths of 6 young adults due to fentanyl poisoning. Today, fentanyl sold in Ellensburg comes almost exclusively in powder form and laboratory testing has shown the drug is mixed with a variety of substances.

A recent lab report showed what was believed to be powdered fentanyl by the suspect, turned out to be "BTMPS" also known as bis(2,2,6,6-tetramethyl-4-piperidyl) sebacate. This substance is reported to be an industrial chemical used to coat plastics and paint to reduce oxidization. The

crime lab advised this chemical began showing up in the fentanyl supply in Washington, starting about mid-2024. The lab believes this to be a cutting agent for fentanyl, and at times, there is too much BTMPS in the sample and that makes the fentanyl undetectable. Since this is a new substance showing up in the drug supply, there is not much information about the long-term effects. The fact that the purity of the fentanyl sold in our area is so poor is likely to be a factor in the reduced number of drug overdoses deaths in 2024.

Methamphetamine has little changed over the last 5 years and is still readily available for a low price in our community.

Juvenile Crime: We first noticed an increase in juvenile crime in the last half of 2019 with a significant increase in malicious mischief reported crimes. Primarily gang graffiti, we also saw increases in other juvenile related property crimes. During the COVID era, these crimes declined but the influences of gang activity increased. In 2022, the level of violence increased with approximately 32% of overall juvenile crime violence related. In 2023, juvenile crime increased significantly but the percentage of violent crime was reduced to 19%.

During 2024 we had a juvenile gang related murder. Working closely with the United State Marshals Violent Crime Taskforce, and King County area gang taskforces the murder suspect was taken into custody in August. As a result of the increases in juvenile crime, we focused our efforts on identifying programs to prevent crime and to assist parents and the school district with resources to combat this problem. A portion of the response is covered in the program summary below.

We also had some success in 2024 with a 56% decrease in the number of offenders. A 67% decrease in the number of arrests, and a 75% decrease in the number crimes of violence.

Gang Activity: First let me start by saying gang activity is prevalent throughout our state and nation and there is no easy answers or magic wand to waive to make it go away. I will also share that those involved in the Ellensburg area gangs are mostly locals. They may not yet be as hardened as those in the lower Yakima Valley, but they will be as future generations develop.

Those who believe Ellensburg only has wanna-a-be gangs are horribly mistaken and in March of 2024, Ellensburg experienced a gang related homicide, with the fatal shooting at a local restaurant, at the busiest intersection, in the middle of town.

We are working on the problem by identifying those individuals involved or associated with gangs, developing criminal intelligence to better understand the current gang environment, tracking their impacts to the community, removing their graffiti and responding to any anticipated threats they pose to our community.

Crime Reduction Program summary:

Community Survey: Opening the opportunity for community members to voice their concerns and assess how they perceive the safety of their community is instrumental to developing police strategic priorities, which led to the first EPD Safety and Police-Community Interaction Survey

(EPD Community Survey) being implemented in January 2024. The focus of the survey was to determine the overall public assessment of safety and crime; police-community interaction; and identify critical community interest areas. The findings showed a strong trust and legitimacy of EPD and highlighted four key areas of focus: community rapport, mental health, homelessness, and child/youth concerns. The results from this survey provided insight into how to meet the needs of the community and better shape operational planning for the department. The EPD Community Survey will be replicated at the beginning of each calendar year to monitor the department's objective to meet the needs of the Ellensburg community.

Handle With Care Program: Recognizing the need to closely monitor adverse childhood experiences (ACE), identified as a strong indicator to criminal behavior, EPD established a program to identify police contact with calls where juveniles may be exposed to an ACE. To provide supportive outreach to these children, a notification is sent to the Ellensburg School District with only names so schools may extend compassionate support to the child without divulging details regarding the police contact. Additionally, a referral for each child 12-17 years of age who received a Handle with Care notification also receives an automatic referral to CWU Community Clinic for no-cost mental health counseling. As this effort develops, the expectation is to extend the program county wide to encompass all other law enforcement agencies and potentially include other first responder agencies. For more information regarding ACEs see the National Institute of Health webpage, [The Relation Between Adverse Childhood Experiences and Adult Health: Turning Gold into Lead - PMC](#)

Between November 1st and December 31st, we have had 85 Handle with Care notifications, and referrals for counseling services.

Graffiti Abatement Program: To mitigate gang violence and crime, the timely abatement of gang graffiti is important to maintain a clean environment and mitigate concerns of gang related violence. Although EPD has been monitoring incidents of graffiti for several years, the need for a more robust process to rid the community of graffiti was identified, which led to the partnership of EPD with the Ellensburg Morning Rotary Club. This collaboration will facilitate support to property owners to rid their property of graffiti vandalism. A memorandum of understanding is currently under review by the city to solidify this collaboration and regional resources have been obtained at no cost to minimize the cost of painting supplies for the partnership and the property owners.

High-Density Residential Area Project: Developed to reduce the number of non-emergency calls for service, an effort was established to work directly with management companies of high-density residential areas (i.e., apartment complexes). The intent of this project is to foster a collaboration to triage complaints between lease agreement violations and emergency response. This effort empowers management companies to enforce area policies without the need for police intervention. This project's efforts have consisted of information sharing on crime statistics, residential safety surveys, and community safety presentations. Since implementing these projects, quarterly reporting shows a significant decrease in non-emergency calls for areas initially identified as most recurrent non-emergent calls for service.

Community Education Video Project: Through an effort to increase transparency between EPD and the public, EPD has developed interactive educational videos posted, which are posted to social media. Topics of these videos include jay walking, School Resource Officers, college town safety, DUI response and mental health. The intention of these publications is to dispel myths and provide detailed information to address questions and concerns posed to EPD through social commentary and the EPD Community Survey. A prioritized list of topics is identified for the next calendar year, and additional channels of communication will be explored to ensure the widest dissemination/accessibility of information sharing.

Community Health & Safety Experience (CHASE) Program: The EPD CHASE Program is a collaborative community effort to provide individuals with the practical experience necessary to understand the unique policing needs in Ellensburg. As a three-part field experience, volunteers will be able to learn about local policing; community partnerships; and prepare for potential employment in law enforcement as an officer, administrative support, or analyst. Those that complete the program will have a fundamental framework to better understand the complexities of civic safety and generate the credentials to become a stronger candidate for future employment. Initiation of this program is through a collaboration with the CWU Law & Justice Program to nest the CHASE Program into their field-experience curriculum. The first cohort of the CHASE Program is scheduled to begin during the CWU fall quarter 2025.

Community Impact Notification Program: The importance of quickly recognizing, assessing, and responding to increases in calls is an important early intervention to help reduce unnecessary calls and decrease crime. Frequent monitoring of trends allows us to notify those who are responsible, so we can work together towards solving the problem with non-enforcement solutions when possible.

Example - First utilized in September, a significant increase was observed in alarm calls involving businesses. Analysis of the calls revealed a small number of businesses had a significant increase in calls beginning in July. One business had 36 false alarm calls January – September, averaging 7 calls a month. A letter was sent to the person responsible for this business and as a result, there were only 2 false alarms for the last 3 months of the year for this business. The other businesses also showed significant improvement. Only one business remained unchanged.

Community Engagement

National Night Out: Held the first Tuesday in August, the annual National Night Out has been a great way to show our community how much we appreciate their support. With a theme of child safety, our many professional partners all come out to enjoy the food prepared and cooked by police officers, city attorney and the city manager. Those in attendance can see the many police, fire and emergency service vehicles. The display of Hot Rods is always a big attraction. This event brings our entire community together as you will find families of all ages and visitors from throughout the state.

Cop-on-Top: Our partnership with Fred Meyers and other emergency service agencies continues to be a great success. Spending time with our local special Olympics athletes and their support volunteers is always a great time. The donations and support our community provide is truly outstanding.

Shop-with-a-Cop and Firefighter: By far our most involved events, the annual shopping event has grown and improved over the years. This year over 50 children from throughout Kittitas County were able to participate. New in 2024, was the addition of quality photographs of the shopper and their cop or firefighter. The breakfast provided by KVFR and the gift wrapping provided by local teachers and school staff, made for a memorable occasion. This year was also a first as we were able to provide a bicycle and fitted safety helmet for every participant that did not have one. We also thank Bi-Mart for the shopping experience and Rory Savage from Windemere Reality for the Christmas dinner basket each family receives at the end of the morning and most of all the community for their generous donations which allowed the kids a wonderful Christmas experience.

Other Programs

Reserve Program: We started 2024 with 8 reserve officers and ended the year with 5. The reserve officer program provides an outstanding resource to the department and the city. Comprised of educators and a recent CWU graduate, the reserve officer program is voluntary. Reserves serve their community as part time police officers to make the community safer. In addition to working the road, reserve officers serve the community in outreach, Cop on Top, The Kittitas County Fair and Rodeo Parade, National Night Out, Shop with a Cop and school athletic events. Their service is greatly appreciated, and they are a vital part of the department.

Drone Program: The drone program began in 2024 with funding approved by the council. During the first year we were able to train and license 5 operators and acquired 2 UAS platforms and supporting software. We also created a monthly reporting requirement to ensure the utilization of the program is focused and efficient. During 2024, the drone program flew 22 missions and assisted in 6 apprehensions. These missions supported 2 parade details, the graffiti project, KVFR with a brush fire at the west interchange, 6 investigations and 12 patrol support flights.

Total Missions Flown – 22 missions, 40 flights, 9hr 29min flight time

Total Training – 5 pilots, 170 flights, 17hr 25min flight time

Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) Program: Late in 2024, we contracted with Flock safety for the installation of 13 ALPR cameras, positioned strategically around the city. Using Flock, we have been able to identify several instances where vehicles with stolen license plates entered the city and have identified vehicles involved in local crimes. With full installation not occurring until late in November, the benefit to this technology is still being evaluated but it is promising.

Administrative Reporting

Complaints: With five job performance complaints, 2024 had the lowest number of complaints against officers in the last 5 years. Through investigation, three of the five complaints revealed no violation of policy while two complaints were founded, resulting in corrective measures being taken.

Complaint Type	2024	2023	2022	2021
Job Performance	5 (0)	3 (*1)	9 (*5)	10 (*1)
Vehicle Operation	0	0	0	3
Excessive Force	0	2	0	3
Off-duty Conduct	0	3	1	0
Complaint total	5	8	10	16
Founded Complaints	2	3	0	3

*Bias Policing allegation

Response to Resistance: 2024 Response-to-Resistance Report

Washington State law requires each law enforcement agency to report individual incidents where a law enforcement officer employed by the agency used force and:

	2024	2023	2022	2021
• A fatality occurred	0	0	0	0
• Great bodily harm occurred	0	0	0	0
• Substantial bodily harm occurred	0	0	0	0
• Discharge a firearm at or in the direction of a person;	0	0	0	0
• Pointed a firearm at a person;	5	1	0	0
• Used a chokehold or vascular neck restraint;	0	0	0	0
• Used a Taser, against a person;	2	0	0	1
• Used OC-10 against a person;	0	0	2	0
• Discharged an impact weapon at a person;	0	0	1	0
• Struck a person using an impact weapon	0	0	0	0
• Used any part of their body strike a person;	0	1	0	1
• Used a vehicle to intentionally strike a person or vehicle;	0	0	0	0
• Engaged in a vehicle pursuit;	1	1	0	0
Total	8	3	3	2

Closing

In summary, Ellensburg experienced no overdose deaths and saw a significant decrease in suicide calls, suicide attempts, juvenile crime. We also developed programs to prevent crime and strengthen our community through evidence-based problem solving and partnerships.

Acknowledgments

The successes of 2024 would not have been possible without the dedication of our officers, the support of city leadership, and the partnership of the Ellensburg community. Together, we are building a safer, stronger city for all.

It is an honor to serve as the chief of the police department and I appreciate the community's and council's support.

Chief Ken Wade