

TRAFFIC STOP DATA COLLECTION and ANALYSIS

By Chief George Carpenter

INTRODUCTION

An Illinois law took effect on January 1, 2004 requiring every state and local police agency to collect race data on each traffic stop conducted. This data must be reported to the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT), which is required to report the data to the Illinois General Assembly on July 1, 2005 and each of three succeeding years.

DEPARTMENT POLICY

Biased policing erodes public trust in the Police, clearly alienates large segments of those we are sworn to serve, and violates the constitution and laws of this country. The Wilmette Police are committed to fair treatment and equal protection under the law for all persons at all times without exception. Through written policy, operational practices, training and supervision the Wilmette Police prohibit biased policing in any form. Wilmette uses a multi-faceted strategy to ensure that the organizational culture embraces these positive policing values.

THE BENCHMARK

Much of the data Wilmette collects on traffic stops can be analyzed for “internal consistency.” For example, is the citation/warning rate similar for Caucasians and Minorities? This question can be answered by analyzing Wilmette’s data itself.

For other data, however, a benchmark or comparison point is needed. Establishing this benchmark is inexact at best, and somewhat controversial. Northwestern University’s Center for Public Safety, which is conducting the data analysis for the State of Illinois, has chosen a specific benchmark to use: the race/ethnicity of persons old enough to be licensed drivers in the towns that correspond with the various Court Districts in Cook County.

This type of benchmark is called an “adjusted census” benchmark, because it consists of U.S. census data by race for persons 15 years old and above in each of the municipalities whose criminal court cases are heard in the district court.

The adjusted census benchmark for Court District 2, which includes Wilmette, is

80.4 % Caucasian and 19.6 % minority.

WILMETTE'S DATA

During 2004 the Wilmette Police conducted **5,881** traffic stops. The three tables below summarize data for stops, reasons for the stop, and citations/warnings. The overall percentages of minority and Caucasian drivers stopped in Wilmette during 2004 are virtually identical to the benchmark Northwestern University has selected (Table 1).

Table 1
**2004 Comparison of
Benchmark and Traffic Stops**

| | Caucasian | Minority |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Benchmark Population | 80.4 % | 19.6 % |
| Wilmette Traffic Stops | 80.1 % | 19.9 % |

Table 2 below analyzes the reasons for which Caucasian and minority drivers are stopped. For example, of all the Caucasian drivers that were stopped in Wilmette, 82.2% were stopped for the commission of moving violations.

Table 2
**Reason for the Stop
2004**

| | Caucasian | Minority |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Moving Violation | 82.2% | 76.1% |
| Equipment Violation | 6.9% | 12.3% |
| License / Registration | 10.9% | 11.5% |

Note the consistency in Table 3 (next page) from benchmark to traffic stops to tickets to warnings. This tells me there was no apparent adverse impact from the way that Wilmette Officers made traffic enforcement decisions.

Table 3
**Traffic Stops, Citations and Warnings
 2004**

| | Caucasian | Minority |
|------------------------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Population Benchmark | 80.4% | 19.6% |
| Percentage of Traffic Stops | 80.1% | 19.9% |
| Percentage of All Citations | 80.5% | 19.5% |
| Percentage of All Warnings | 79.8% | 20.2% |

Though not required by law, the Wilmette Police have chosen to analyze driver gender data. This enables us to answer the question, ‘After the traffic stop has been conducted, do Wilmette Police Officers treat men and women similarly or differently when making enforcement decisions?’ Table 4 shows there is only minimal variance.

Table 4
**Outcome of Traffic Stop
 By Race & Gender**

| | Caucasian | | Minority | |
|------------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Citations | 49.4% | 48% | 49.4% | 44.3% |
| Warning | 50.6% | 52% | 50.6% | 55.7% |

Table 5
**Wilmette Residents versus Non-Residents
 2004 Traffic Stop Data**

| | Wilmette Residents | Non Residents |
|--|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Traffic Stops | 25% | 75% |
| Reason for Stop | | |
| Moving Violations | 81% | 81% |
| Equipment Violations | 7% | 8% |
| Registration/License Violations | 12% | 11% |
| Outcome of Stop | | |
| Citation Issued | 48% | 49% |
| Verbal Warning | 52% | 51% |

The data in Table 5 above show the professional consistency being exercised in traffic stop activity by the Wilmette Police. It is readily apparent that a driver's residency status is irrelevant to either the Officer's reason for the traffic stop, or the outcome of the stop. This is consistent with Wilmette's philosophy and training.

SEARCHES

The majority of Wilmette's searches are categorized as "search incident to arrest". This means that the search of the vehicle is a requirement pursuant to a custodial arrest that is being made. In Wilmette the number of "discretionary" searches, also called consent searches, is so low that they are not statistically significant, as shown in Table 6 (next page). It is discretionary police searches that have traditionally been the concern of minority groups.

Table 6
Number of Consent Searches
2004

| Total | Caucasian | Minority |
|-------|-----------|----------|
| 20 | 13 | 7 |

There were 1,172 traffic stops of minority drivers conducted in 2004 by the Wilmette Police. Only seven (7) of those traffic stops resulted in discretionary searches.

CONCLUSIONS

The data in this report show Wilmette Police Officers are engaging in bias-free traffic enforcement.

During the first year of the Illinois traffic stop data collection law, we have learned that interpreting the data we've collected is a complex task. To some extent this complexity allows a reviewer (including ourselves) to project previously held beliefs onto the organization. In other words, we may be seeing what we want to see in the data. In cautioning against this form of interpretation error, we pledge to continue studying the data that we are collecting every day, to report to you our honest understanding and interpretation of the data whatever that may be, and to continuously promote and train Wilmette Police Officers in our policy of prohibiting biased policing in any form.

George E. Carpenter
Chief of Police