

Early Warning Systems for Law Enforcement



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POLICE FOUNDATION

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Institute for Integrity,

Leadership, and Professionalism

Early Warning Systems (EWS)

An EWS is “a data-based police management tool designed to identify officers whose behavior is problematic, as well as to provide corrective intervention” *(Walker, Alpert, and Kenney, NIJ, 2000)*



“A proactive management tool useful for identifying a wide range of problems” or “inappropriate supervisory instructions” *(The IACP)*

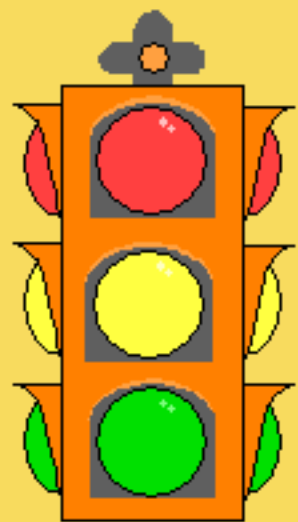
What is an EWS?

- A mechanism for creating early warnings when officers are *AT RISK* or *POSE A RISK* to other officers, citizens, etc.
- Serve as a risk management device for reducing liability
- An instrument for improving credibility and ensuring *accountability*



Purposes of EWS

- **Identify potential problems at the earliest possible stage**
- **Reduce potential for serious problem(s)**
- **Provide a mechanism for intervention *PRIOR* to discipline**
- **Promotes positive performance**
- **Creates a system of accountability**



Why are EWS Necessary?

Because they help you....

- **Reduce Liability**
- **Minimize Litigation**
- **Save Law Enforcement Careers**
- **Improve Service Delivery**
- **Raise Public Confidence**

Philosophy Behind EWS

- **Prevention is better than discipline**
- **Management has an obligation to guide performance**
- **Proactive intervention is more positive than imposing discipline**

National Statistics on EWS

- 36% of agencies with 500 to 999 officers have an EWS, with 20% planning one
- 62% of agencies with 1,000 or more officers have an EWS, with 12% planning one
- Half of existing EWS were created in last five years *(Walker, Alpert, & Kenney, 2000)*

Examples of Potential Risk Indicators



- **Number and Type of Complaints**
- **Excessive Force**
- **Missing Court Appearances**
- **Vehicle Pursuits and Accidents**
- **Abuse of Sick Leave**
- **Disproportionate Enforcement of Traffic Laws**
- **Civil Litigation**
- **Damage to Property**
- **Excessive Off Duty Employment**
- **Financial Difficulties**
- **ETC.**

EWS and Accountability

EWS improve accountability within the organization by:

- 1) providing supervisors with a tool for tracking and monitoring performance;
- 2) synthesizing important data and information related to individual, unit, and supervisory performance;
- 3) requiring command staff to act upon critical information in a positive way, prior to discipline

Successful Risk Management Requires:

- Interpretation of data and information
- Periodic monitoring of key risk indicators
- Supervisory judgment and authority to intervene
- Alternatives to discipline

THE SYSTEM DOES NOT MAKE
DECISIONS –



IT IS ONLY A TOOL

***SUCCESSFUL RISK MANAGEMENT
REQUIRES YOUR***

***KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE,
DISCRETION, AND JUDGMENT***

Components of a Risk Management Strategy

- Implement an EWS
- Hold Risk Management Meetings
- Generate Meaningful Reports
- Initiate Proactive Screening, Integrity Testing, and “Fitness for Duty Evaluations”
- Conduct Periodic Departmental Audits
- Implement Routine Community Surveys
- Provide of Alternatives to Discipline (e.g. training, counseling, CISD, EAP, etc.)

Automated Early Warning System Technology

- Manual systems are a starting point
- More data and information can be captured and easily analyzed with a computerized system
- Many existing computerized systems are de-centralized, making interpretation across risk categories difficult
- Comprehensive risk management technology is becoming the trend

Options for Implementation

- Develop your own in-house system
 - **Pros:** tailored to specific agency needs, the agency owns the programming code
 - **Cons:** may take too long, may have limited resources for development
- Purchase/license an existing system
 - **Pros:** less costly, immediately available, may include additional functionality related to other needs
 - **Cons:** you are somewhat reliant on the vendor, inability to get agency funds for acquisition

Conclusions

- Agencies who don't have EWS are at risk of litigation and liability, and lack the tools necessary for accountability
- EWS help to identify individuals who are *AT RISK* or *POSE A RISK* to the agency, as well as identify possible underlying problems so that appropriate assistance can be given
- EWS promote positive performance
- EWS are only a tool; people need to interpret data and make informed decisions