



CITY OF ATLANTA

City Auditor's Office
Leslie Ward, City Auditor
404.330.6452

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Why We Did This Audit

The Atlanta Police Department accounted for about one third of the city's general fund budget in fiscal year 2009, and personnel costs make up more than 93% of the department's budget. This audit seeks to examine the department's existing deployment strategy and whether it is sufficient to cover service requests by citizens. Furthermore, this audit will provide the police department with tools to aid in the strategic deployment of officers to patrol zones.

What We Recommended

Our recommendations are intended to assist the Atlanta Police Department to better use its CAD data to support strategic patrol deployment decisions.

- The police department should regularly measure and report on blackout and uncommitted time, in each zone and for the department as a whole, and use these measures as tools to strategically deploy patrol resources.
- The police department should set a goal for the percentage of uncommitted time in each zone and consider uncommitted time as well as blackout in assigning resources.

We have made our program code available to the police department, and are working with the department to evaluate the effect of recent changes, including employee furloughs, on patrol officer availability.

For more information regarding this report, please contact Eric Palmer at 404.330.6455 or epalmer@atlantaga.gov.

Performance Audit:

Police Patrol Officer Availability

What We Found

The Atlanta Police Department has an opportunity to better align patrol resources to its workload. Blackout, which is the period when all officers in a zone are busy and cannot respond to a call for service, happens in every patrol zone but in some more frequently than others. For example, zone 5 (Downtown/Midtown) experienced 49 days with no blackout from March 1, 2007, through March 31, 2008, while zone 1 (West Atlanta) never went a day without blackout. Blackout varies among the zones because of differences in resources, workload, and the types of calls.

We found that most zones had a seasonal variation in workload, but staffing was not adjusted to meet the changes in demand. Calls for service were generally higher in the summer months, but the number of units on patrol stayed consistent through the time period. We also found workload variations by day of the week and time of day. While calls for service were higher on Fridays and Saturdays, blackout was higher on other days. Likewise, zones had their lowest call volume between 1:00 AM and 7:00 AM, yet the number of patrol units on duty varied little across shifts. A mismatch between staffing and workload leads to increased rates of blackout. Police commanders could shift resources from days and times with lower workload to assist with periods of higher workload.

Disparities in uncommitted time among the zones reflect resource differences. Uncommitted time is the percent of a beat officer's time available between dispatches. Officers could engage in community policing activities or patrolling during these times. Uncommitted time varied among the zones from 25% to 45%. Reallocating resources could increase uncommitted time for some zones and shift uncommitted time to times of day when it could be more productive.