

Executive Summary

State Environmental Conservation Police

In April 2006, the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee voted to undertake a study of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) State Environmental Conservation Police (EnCon police). The focus of the study was to evaluate their performance in enforcing fish and game laws, state parks and forest rules, boating laws, and applicable criminal laws, and in conducting related functions.

The current State Environmental Conservation Police can trace their origins to the first ten men appointed as “Special Game Protectors” by the Commission of Fisheries and Game, which was established by the General Assembly in 1895. Under the authority of the commission, the game protectors were assigned to enforce fish and game laws anywhere within the state. Since then the duties and responsibilities of the conservation officers have expanded from the original role of protecting fish and game to also include:

- enforcement of boating law;
- enforcement of snowmobile and all terrain vehicle laws;
- enforcement of motor vehicle law;
- enforcement of criminal law;
- policing the 137 state parks and forests;
- assisting and supporting state and municipal police departments;
- assisting and supporting homeland security;
- assisting and supporting the U.S. Coast Guard on Long Island Sound; and
- responding to search and rescue missions and missing person incidents in state parks and forests, on state lakes and rivers, and on Long Island Sound.

This study examined the adequacy of the division’s authority, the deployment of officers and sufficiency of overall staffing, the trends in the nature and types of incidents and enforcement actions, the condition of EnCon equipment and facilities, and a number of selected management practices. The committee found that while overall operational trends tend to indicate the division could benefit from additional staffing, a more detailed assessment of staffing needs requires that EnCon and DEP management clearly identify and define the mission, goals, and objectives the division is expected to achieve.

While the division is highly regarded by those organizations and agencies that depend on it, some fundamental questions have to be answered before a fair assessment of its needs and achievements can be performed. The committee made a number of recommendations regarding the development of a policing philosophy, a strategic plan, and the creation of standards for the level of service EnCon police should be providing to assist the division in answering those questions.

The committee also developed specific recommendations in a number of areas to improve the current operation of the division. These include modifications to its authority, a re-examination of its deployment practices, revisions to its General Orders, training and equipment

improvements, standardization of procedures for the department's dispatch center, and improvements to other selected administrative practices.

At its December 14, 2006 meeting, the committee adopted 26 recommendations. The approved recommendations are listed below.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. The authority of EnCon police should be modified to allow conservation officers to enforce narcotics violations, traffic signal violations, and larceny in the fifth and sixth degree off of DEP owned and controlled property, without having the violation enforced in conjunction with a breach of the laws enumerated in C.G.S. Section 26-6(a). In addition, the crimes of negligent hunting and hunting under the influence should be explicitly enumerated in C.G.S. Section 26-6(a).**
- 2. The division should regularly assess the training needs of its personnel to ensure the training they receive allows them to perform their duties with confidence in the field.**
- 3. The administrative sergeant located at the Central Headquarters in Hartford should be responsible for finding appropriate elective training events and implementing a system to notify all officers of the dates of such events as well as deadlines for application.**
- 4. Officer deployment and the patrol zone structure should be reexamined, along with a review as to how incidents are monitored and distributed, to better allocate the caseload among field officers.**
- 5. EnCon police should institute a protocol to obtain information from state and municipal police departments regarding police activity on DEP property, beginning with parks with high attendance, to fully understand the amount of enforcement activity occurring on DEP property.**
- 6. EnCon officer work schedules should be better aligned with the occurrence of incidents.**
- 7. Department of Environmental Protection management needs to explicitly determine the expected role and performance of the EnCon police and develop policy statements on the desired policing style and service philosophy of the division.**
- 8. The EnCon police should develop a new strategic plan with explicit objectives and performance indicators for the division related to its mission. Performance measures should address expected levels of service in parks and for other organizations that depend on EnCon services, and its accomplishments related to its resource protection functions, as well as traditional process and output measures such as response times, length of time for case closure, and clearance rates for crime. Performance should be closely monitored against established plans and standards.**

- 9. Explicit standards should be created in consultation with the 22 park management units, lake authorities, and other organizations that depend on EnCon police services regarding the expected level of service from EnCon.**
- 10. The Department of Environmental Protection should explore expanding training requirements for park aides to include conflict management and methods for dealing with difficult people, especially in parks with high attendance.**
- 11. The Department of Environmental Protection should develop a long-term plan, along with a commitment for funding in the next budget cycle, for the expected replacement of retiring officers. It should be phased-in to address anticipated shortages of sworn personnel and recognize the need for extended training of new officers.**
- 12. The division should expand the opportunities for conservation officers to participate in the selection of equipment.**
- 13. DEP should explore the potential benefits of the use of surveillance technology, especially for historically significant buildings and other vulnerable park buildings, and expand the use of mobile data technology to increase the safety and efficiency of officers in the field.**
- 14. The department should plan for and phase in facility improvements that accommodate the unique needs of the EnCon police in a timely manner as funds are made available, in accordance with the recommendations provided by the 2002 independent facilities review to provide each district's headquarters with additional space and modern amenities.**
- 15. The division shall ensure compliance with the chain of custody requirements recommended by accreditation standards such as CALEA (Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc.) or POSTC (Police Officer Standards and Training Council).**
- 16. The division should revise the General Orders to include topics that are either missing or underdeveloped and establish a process for periodic review and update.**
- 17. The division should also consider seeking accreditation from either POSTC or CALEA.**
- 18. Supervisors should adhere to the report format presented in General Orders Chapter 4, Section 2, Appendix A for internal affairs investigations and administrative inquiries to ensure the accuracy and completeness of these files. Appendix A should be amended to include a description of the method of corrective action decided upon.**

- 19. The DEP Emergency Dispatch Center should develop and periodically update a standard operating procedures manual to include, but not be limited to call handling procedures on how emergency and non-emergency calls are handled and how calls are to be managed when there is no officer on duty. These protocols should be followed and well documented to increase the accountability of both officers and dispatch operators. The procedures manual should be available in an easy to use and easy to reference format.**
- 20. EnCon should review, validate, and further refine the underlying incident and activity data codes along with the input criteria for its Computer Aided Dispatch system.**
- 21. The DEP Emergency Dispatch Center should develop a quality assurance program to ensure appropriate and defensible dispatch procedures are followed. The program should include a periodic review of recorded calls to ensure each dispatch operator asked the right questions, provided the correct answers, and followed protocol. DEP dispatch will need to retrain operators to address any deficiencies that are revealed.**
- 22. The DEP Emergency Dispatch Center should develop a clear, safe, and consistent strategy for handling calls that require medical assistance, such as transferring calls to emergency 9-1-1.**
- 23. The DEP Emergency Dispatch Center should develop and report annually performance measures related to dispatch functions and operations, including but not limited to dispatcher response times and accuracy standards.**
- 24. Personnel representing the DEP Emergency Dispatch Center and the Division of State Environmental Conservation Police should meet at least annually to formally review the trends and findings revealed by dispatch documentation. Any changes in codes, policies, procedures, and deployment, and when those changes are to be implemented should be documented.**
- 25. EnCon police should examine becoming a member of regional mutual aid agreements throughout the state, and enter into mutual aid agreements or memoranda of understanding with municipalities where it will be beneficial for both agencies to formally define their relationship and respective responsibilities in areas of mutual concern or in the event of an emergency situation.**
- 26. EnCon should institute a practice of having captains meet with the relevant local chiefs of police before and after the summer season to discuss areas of mutual concern in areas with high attendance parks.**