

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

Palmdale Sheriff's Station

Project Description

The Palmdale Sheriff's Station has the largest patrol area of all Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department Stations. With an area covering approximately 720 square miles, we serve over a quarter of a million community members. Our patrol area covers the contract City of Palmdale, and the unincorporated areas of the city. The largest area of our responsibility lies in rural towns surrounding the City of Palmdale. Those areas include Acton, Agua Dulce, Leona Valley, Lake Hughes, Lake Elizabeth, Littlerock, Pearblossom, Llano, and Wrightwood. Those townships make up over 600 square miles rural desert and mountain areas. Unfortunately, the bulk of those areas are privately owned, and/or are not open to Off-highway Vehicle activity. Therein lies our issues with O.H.V. activity.

Within our jurisdiction, we have extremely limited O.H.V. opportunity. Littlerock Dam, roughly 70 miles of U.S. Forest Service trails, and a fee use motocross track (L.A. County Raceway) are the only legal riding areas. Adjacent to our area is El Mirage, Rohwer Flats, and a fee use track at the Antelope Valley Fairgrounds in the City of Lancaster. Within 50 miles of our jurisdiction lies Dove Springs, Jawbone Canyon, and Hungry Valley recreation areas.

The issues faced by the Palmdale Sheriff's Station are not related to operators in legal areas, but are private property issues. We regularly patrol areas which are open for O.H.V. enthusiasts, conduct equipment checks, and provide information to trail users, who are generally found to be in compliance with both law and equipment. We are often met with gratitude in these areas, as these operators are generally more conscientious about opportunity and the potential for loss of area due to a lack of respect for the areas available to them. Our issues are associated with a segment of O.H.V. enthusiasts who believe that our vast amount of open space is "Kings X" and open for riding, when in fact, it is private property and closed to such activity.

Our station responds to over 800 calls for service each year related to illegal O.H.V. activity. Lancaster Sheriff's Station, an area we intend to cover as a courtesy (the Lancaster Station does not have an O.H.V. team in place), responds to over 400 calls for service related to illegal O.H.V. activity a year. These numbers do not reflect the amount of responses made by patrols to "Be On The Look Out" (BOLO) messages, which would nearly double the number of responses we make each year. The response necessary to these calls for service and "BOLO"s is not only at a tremendous cost to tax payers, but a tremendous burden to patrol units handling issues of a more emergent nature.

Our O.H.V. team has been active since the year 2000, initially concentrating on the issues within the City of Palmdale. The program has always existed with a balance of enforcement and education. As a result of our activities within the city limits, the number of calls for service related to illegal O.H.V. usage has all but been eliminated. Over the past few years we have been able to concentrate our resources in the unincorporated areas of our jurisdiction. Our program in those areas is exactly where we expect it to be. We have started increased enforcement in our rural areas, yet have not seen a decrease in calls for service. That is due largely to the fact we are more visible in those areas and therefore, people are more encouraged to call when the issues arise, knowing we have the resources to respond quicker and more efficiently. In our patrols, we are noticing a decreased amount of activity, which supports our conclusion in regards to the steady number of calls for service. As stated before, our program is a balance of education and enforcement. We address our O.H.V.

issues as “quality of life” issues, rather than crime. The last thing our program wants is discourage O.H.V. activity. It is actually quite the opposite. We are actively working with other entities to try and find and develop more opportunity for enthusiasts. We realize the development of new opportunity in our area is one of the keys to eliminated the issues we face.

Because our program is driven by calls for service, we are for the most part contacting people who are trespassing on private property, riding improperly equipped vehicles on the streets, illegal dumping, and illegal shooting. Couple those issues with the fact we are in a high fire danger area during a drought cycle, and we have a recipe for serious problems. While most O.H.V. enthusiasts are courteous to others, the general complaints regarding the trespassers is that they are “discourteous to horseman, bicyclists, and walkers”, often intruding in areas they know are not open to motorized traffic, such as the Pacific Crest Trail.

Our program consists of deploying anywhere from two to eight team members to our problem areas on changing days and times. We intend to continue to enforce all applicable laws relating to O.H.V. usage, applying our balance of education and enforcement. We have a strong Volunteer group of 82 members, 48 of which do regular patrols of our chronic problem areas. They are the “eyes and ears” of our department, advising us of issues as they occur, and providing literature relative to legal riding opportunities close to our area. Between our team deployments and our Volunteer group, we are able to provide coverage a minimum of four days a week, sometimes reaching seven days a week. Our goal is to decrease the amount of illegal activity, which we believe will make it easier for us to help identify and develop a new viable site.

Our focus will be on the following areas;

Agua Dulce: We have a significant amount of calls relating to illegal O.H.V. activity in this area. The calls range from trespass to young riders operating their vehicles on county maintained streets, with no regard for their safety or the safety of others.

In this area during the month of June, we deployed our team almost daily for two weeks straight. The response from the community was fantastic, with some saying “you could hear birds and crickets chirping again.”

The deployment areas will include Darling road, property adjacent to the Agua Dulce Airpark, Shady Lane/Pratty Road, Telephone Road, and Briggs Road.

This community will also be the focus of a Town Hall meeting, along with Acton, during the month of October, relating to the O.H.V. usage in the area.

Acton: This area also generates a tremendous amount of calls for service related to illegal O.H.V. activity. The complaints are similar to those from Agua Dulce. Our focus areas will be Upper Crown Valley Road, Carson Mesa Road, Hubbard Road, Red Rover Mine Road, and the areas adjacent to them.

Lake Elizabeth: This area has several problems areas along Leona Avenue, areas surrounding

Leona Valley
Lake Hughes

Johnson Road, Muntz Ranch, and traffic accessing U.S. Forest Service trails in and around Lake Hughes.

Littlerock: This area has been a chronic problem spot for trespass issues. Our focus area will be along Mount Emma, between Cheseboro Road and Fort Tejon Road. Areas known as “The Pit” and ridge lines throughout the area are constantly trespassed upon, permanently scarring the hillsides with trails, which invites riders who think it is a legal riding area. We also will be focusing on trespass issues in the desert area covering most of the eastern portion of the town.

West Lancaster: This area is under Lancaster Sheriff Station’s jurisdiction, however, we will be providing coverage as a courtesy, as it is adjacent to our area and we share the common issues. We will be focusing on the area starting in West Palmdale at 70th Street West and Avenue O and running northwest, through to 110th Street West to the west and Avenue K to the north. This area has a large amount of open space, privately owned and adjacent to new development, creating a large amount of noise and dust complaints from residents.

Barrel Springs: This area sees ups and downs as far trespass issues go. Our focus will be the areas surrounding Barrel Springs Road, from Pearblossom Highway to 40th Street East. This area is amongst rural homes, and is about four square miles in size. This area is slated for development and both City of Palmdale and Los Angeles County officials have asked us to continue our efforts in this area.

While these areas are our most troublesome spots, they don’t represent the entire area. The sheer size of our area is inviting to O.H.V. enthusiasts from the Santa Clarita, San Fernando, and Simi valleys. The bulk of our contacts come from outside our jurisdiction, transient traffic who “heard from friends” there is good riding in the area. While they are not wrong about the area’s appeal, the fact remains, these are not open riding areas, and generate complaints as a result.

Our team members are first responders with basic first aid skills. We carry first aid kits on each deployment. Our team works closely with the Sheriff Department’s Antelope Valley Search and Rescue Team. Given our mobility, we are able to respond to areas not afforded to regular vehicles. We have assisted with rescues, searches for critical missing persons, suspects on our desert floor and in our mountains, and escaped inmates or convicts. We also have the Sheriff Department’s Aero Bureau at our disposal, and have used them regularly in our operations.

Our team regularly is involved in community outreach programs. We participate in the Public Safety Expo, Fire Service Day, and National Night Out events, as well as smaller community events we are able to attend, such as the Agua Dulce Country Fair, the Cherry Blossom Festival in Leona Valley, and the Littlerock Fall Festival. At these events we interact with community members, educating them on the legalities of O.H.V. activity in our area, safety gear, and proper equipment maintenance. We also hand out brochures outlining O.H.V. opportunity in our area, as well as others.

During the last complete fiscal year, we were able to surpass our deliverables, despite having some unrelated injuries to team members, leaving us a little short handed. We were able to accomplish this within the grants time period. All costs relating to the management of our program were provided as an in-kind match using current Sheriff’s Department staffing.