



## **AD HOC COMMITTEES**

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The mission of Ad Hoc Committees are to handle matters that do not come within the scope of other Standing Committees or which cannot be adequately be handled by only one of the Committees. The Committees sought to investigate issues deemed critical to the quality of life within Kern County and offer recommendations. Ad Hoc Committees are not activated until a specific need arises.

### **KERN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE EMERGENCY SERVICES COMMITTEE**

The Kern County Sheriff's Office Emergency Services Ad Hoc Committee pursuant to California Penal Code §925 will fulfill its responsibility for reviewing the Kern County Sheriff's Bomb Squad, Search and Rescue Squad and the K-9 Unit Program to the management, performance and execution of their service to the taxpayers of Kern County.

The Committee will also make appropriate recommendations for improvement intended to maximize efficiency of the units investigated. This will minimize waste of taxpayer's money while assuring the safety of the County residents.

Earlene Hightower, Chairman Ray Grissom Donna Schaffel Judi House Gary Chaffin  
Andi Derrick Warren Jones

# **KERN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE EMERGENCY SERVICES**

## **PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:**

Penal Code §925 enables the Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) access to programs associated with all County departments. The Kern County Sheriff's Office (KCSO) Search and Rescue (SAR) along with the Air Support Unit, Bomb Squad, and K-9 Unit was of particular interest to members of the Grand Jury and a Kern County Emergency Services Ad Hoc Committee was formed.

## **I. SEARCH AND RESCUE**

### **BACKGROUND AND FACTS:**

The KCSO has an established history of providing search and rescue services to the citizens of Kern County. There are separate SAR groups located throughout the county consisting of over 325 citizen volunteers.

- A. The groups that provide volunteer search and rescue operations for the County of Kern are:
1. Bakersfield Search and Rescue
    - Assists with rescues or recovery of drowning victims in the lower Kern River Canyon and the waterways of the southern San Joaquin Valley
    - Assists in searches for missing children, seniors, or at-risk citizens in all areas of the county
    - Supports other units when necessary
  2. Tehachapi Mountain Search and Rescue
    - Covers the range of Tehachapi Mountains searching for lost hunters, hikers and downed aircraft
    - Conducts rescues from mine shafts and other areas within the Mojave Desert
  3. China Lake Mountain Rescue
    - Possesses expertise in searching and maneuvering in the rugged and jagged terrain of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range
    - Utilized in rescues on Mt. Whitney and other isolated areas
  4. Desert Search and Rescue
    - This unit consists of Mojave, Boron and Rosamond and is used extensively in desert rescues and is familiar with extreme heat and sandstorms
  5. Indian Wells Valley Search and Rescue is currently suspended due to lack of staff.

6. Kern Valley Search and Rescue
  - Kern County's first search and rescue group
  - Conducts rescues on the upper Kern River and in Lake Isabella
  - Conducts rescues from mine shafts and other areas within the Mojave Desert
7. Search and Rescue Divers
  - Divers provide rescue and recovery services in all waterways in Kern County
8. Southern Kern Search and Rescue
  - Works the south end of the San Joaquin Valley
  - Utilized in searches for downed aircraft in the Ridge area
  - Conducts searches for victims lost in the snow
9. Kern County Sheriff's Mounted Search and Rescue
  - Consists of horse and rider teams certified in 25 skill areas
  - Especially useful in urgent searches covering large areas
  - Ideal for search perimeter control
  - Other search and rescue units benefit from transportation of equipment and supplies by the mounted unit

B. The Air Support Unit of the KCSO began in 1972 and was active until 1978 when the unit was deactivated due to lack of funding. It was reactivated in 1984.

1. The KCSO's helicopters are used for various missions. They support all public safety agencies within Kern County, the State of California and the U.S. Federal Government. Search and rescue missions are included within this unit.
2. The unit is in a constant state of readiness as an airborne asset.

## **II. THE BOMB SQUAD**

### **SUMMARY:**

The record of the KCSO's Bomb Squad is a long and successful one. It was established in 1975, and consisted of two deputies and virtually no specialized equipment. For many years, these were the only ones who responded to the hundreds of calls received, with only a basic toolbox and their knowledge of explosives. Render-safe procedures of suspected bombs consisted mostly of "hand-entry" techniques. The squad eventually improvised their own water cannon using a piece of lead pipe, a modified shotgun shell and plumber's putty. As with today's advanced disrupters, they use the cannon to blast open suspicious packages.

In the 1990's the squad doubled in size, and with a government grant purchased their first x-ray machine and bomb suit. In 2000 the Bomb Squad purchased their first Bomb Squad Response Truck and two years later their first robot.

In 2007, the KCSO matched grant funds and purchased a state-of-the-art Andros F6A robot, complete with remote control capability and four cameras. Since 2007, the Bomb Squad uses more sophisticated equipment than was previously available.

## **PROCESS:**

During a visit to the hangar at the KCSO on Norris Road, members of the Grand Jury were given a demonstration of the vehicle and capabilities of the equipment used by the Bomb Squad Unit.

## **BACKGROUND AND FACTS:**

The KCSO's Bomb Squad is responsible for rendering suspected or actual explosive devices safe and disposing of deteriorated explosives, military ordnance, improvised or illegal fireworks. Other duties include post-blast investigations, providing educational presentations for business and government, law enforcement academies, and in-service training for deputy sheriffs.

- A. Extensive and ongoing training and the use of sophisticated equipment is required for each Bomb Technician. Training courses for Bomb Technicians include:
  - Six-week FBI Hazardous Devices School, Redstone Arsenal, Alabama
  - Hazardous Materials (Haz-Mat) for Bomb Technicians
  - Basic Post Blast Investigation
  - Advanced Post Blast Investigation (large vehicle bomb post blast)
  - Large Vehicle Bomb Countermeasures Course
  - Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) Advanced Explosives Destruction Techniques Course
  - Domestic and International Terrorism
  - Annual international and regional training conferences
  - Every three years, each Bomb Technician returns to Redstone Arsenal for recertification
- B. Bomb Technicians are required to be knowledgeable in explosives theory and electronics, detail oriented, calm under pressure and exhibit common sense.
- C. A Deputy Sheriff must have at least two years of patrol experience to apply and test for assignment as a Bomb Technician.
- D. The KCSO Bomb Squad is a member of the International Association of Bomb Technicians and Investigators (IABTI).
- E. In the budget for KCSO, 0.003% is dedicated to the Bomb Squad for personnel and maintenance.
- F. The tools and equipment used by the Bomb Technicians are costly. Some are purchased through grants, e.g., two 80-pound bomb suits and the department's Bomb Squad Response Truck. Other equipment is issued by the FBI or purchased by the KCSO.
- G. The current bomb squad vehicle was purchased new in 2000. Funding for a replacement has been requested from the California Office of Emergency Services (OES).

- H. The KCSO has a grant writer within its ranks.
- I. Standard equipment used by Bomb Technicians includes:
  - Bomb Truck and Containment Transport Trailer
  - Robot
  - X-Ray
  - Bomb Suits
  - Disruptors
  - Segways
- J. Bomb Squad members are full-time deputies, and receive an additional 5% hazardous duty pay.
- K. The Bomb Squad, on an average, responds to 30-50 callouts per year.

### **III. K-9 UNIT**

#### **PROCESS:**

An interview with the Kern County Sheriff preceded a visit during training of the K-9s which included a demonstration and a discussion with the unit leader.

#### **FACTS:**

- A. The K-9 Unit consists of five teams and cross-trained for patrol work and narcotics detection.
- B. The budget for purchasing a new K-9 and the training of the new team is \$37,500.
- C. The annual budget for training, equipment, food, and veterinary services is \$19,800.
- D. The Kern County Sheriff Department uses Adlerhorst International as their current trainer.
- E. The County Unit does not consistently train with the Bakersfield City (City) K-9 Unit as they utilize different trainers.
- F. Teams are assigned to Metropolitan Patrol based on call volume. However, they are available to, and often do, respond throughout the entire County.
- G. A K-9 is assigned to a deputy and goes through training as a team.
- H. In order to protect their paws, K-9s are only used at night during the hot months and not used in desert areas.

- I. There is no cross-training for SAR and cadaver K-9s.
- J. The deputy drives a car that is modified to accommodate the K-9 and is responsible to maintain this area of the vehicle.
- K. K-9s are used mainly to stop and/or restrain suspects and detect drugs.
  - Currently, K-9s are being trained to locate weapons that have been discarded by suspects
- L. Current staffing is adequate to cover County needs.
- M. In 2005, the Kern County Probation Department implemented a K-9 team. This team consists of a Deputy Probation Officer and a K-9. The mission of this particular team is, *“to provide narcotic detection capability to aid in the investigation, apprehension, and prosecution of persons engaged in illegal narcotics activities.”* The team is assigned to the High Risk Offender Unit.

## **FINDINGS:**

- F1. The Bakersfield Search and Rescue Team are currently in the process of establishing the SAR Medical Team and it should be operational within the next 6–12 months.
- F2. The Indian Wells Mine Rescue Team is currently suspended due to insufficient staffing to perform mine/confined space rescue. Team members have been absorbed by other teams (Tehachapi and Kern Valley).
  - The feasibility of reestablishing the team will be discussed at a future SAR Captains’ meeting
- F3. New bomb squad equipment is budgeted and distributed on an as-needed basis. Future years’ acquisitions will depend on the budget.
- F4. The Bomb Squad has worked with vendors to design a truck that will meet desired specifications. The current vehicle appears to have inadequate space with little room once all equipment is loaded.
- F5. Funding for a new vehicle has been sought through OES. Unused grant funds from previous fiscal years across the State have also been sought. This has been unsuccessful.
- F6. Maintenance on the robot is performed by Bomb Squad Technicians who are self-trained for most repairs. The manufacturer is used as required for parts and service.
- F7. Physical skills tests are conducted in and out of the bomb suit along with an oral interview after having been recommended by the deputy’s supervisor to join the bomb squad.

- F8. Once accepted, the deputy is referred to as a “Bomb Para-Tech”, a temporary position. The squad begins training and evaluating the deputy for the next year, until accepted into the FBI Hazardous Devices School. Upon completion, the deputy becomes a Bomb Technician, capable of rendering explosives safe.
- F9. As a member of the IABTI, Bomb Technicians maintain a close working relationship and share information with other bomb technicians from approximately 60 countries throughout the world.
- F10. The Bomb Squad has received over 52 call-outs this year.
- F11. A part of the K-9 training includes training “agitators.”
- Agitators are deputies that have not received training as a dog handler
  - An agitator acts as a decoy by wearing protective gear and allowing the K-9 team to search for and apprehend them
- F12. Using deputies as agitators has proven to be beneficial in giving the deputy the opportunity to learn about the K-9 program and the role of handler. This creates a group of qualified candidates for future handler positions
- F13. The K-9 stays at the deputy’s home, is fed and trained by that deputy. The K-9 accompanies the deputy to all assignments.
- F14. Though the City Police Department and the County K-9 Units do not consistently train together; at least twice a year joint training sessions are conducted. This allows for the two units to work better together in the field, as well as allowing the teams to learn from one another.
- F15. Coverage times for the K-9 Unit have at least one team on duty from 5 PM until 6 AM seven days a week. If a K-9 team is needed between 6 AM and 5 PM all of the teams are available to be called out.
- F16. At this time, the K-9 Unit does not have a “cadaver” dog. According to the deputies, it can be confusing for a K-9 to be cross-trained in search and rescue and finding cadavers.
- F17. The budget expense towards purchasing and training is only used in the event a K-9 is retired from service and needs to be replaced during the fiscal year
- The salary for the deputy is paid out of the Sheriff’s general budget
- F18. The Probation Department’s K-9 has been trained in narcotics detection, tracking, obedience and protection. This team is also active in community events and various school activities, e.g., school carnivals.
- The team does not train with the KCSO K-9 Unit
  - The K-9 Deputy Probation Officer is paid out of the Probation Department’s general budget

## **COMMENTS:**

The Committee is impressed with the many volunteers in Search and Rescue and the multitude of coverage and services they provide. The Kern River is highly dangerous and has taken many lives.

The Committee thanks the Kern County Sheriff and members of the Bomb Squad for an informative interview and was impressed with their knowledge and enthusiasm for the job.

The Committee, along with the entire Grand Jury, was impressed with the K-9 Unit and is proud of the services provided by the dedicated deputies, as well as their four-footed partners.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- R1. The Bomb Squad should continue to search for grants that may provide for a much needed updated vehicle and other equipment. (Findings 3, 4 and 5)

## **NOTES:**

- The Kern County Sheriff should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.
- Persons wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: [www.co.kern.kern.ca.us/grandjury](http://www.co.kern.kern.ca.us/grandjury).
- Present at past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website: [www.co.kern.ca.us/grandjury](http://www.co.kern.ca.us/grandjury).

## **RESPONSE REQUIRED WITH 60 DAYS**

**PRESIDING JUDGE  
KERN COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT  
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212  
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**

**CC: FOREPERSON  
KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY  
1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600  
BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301**



1350 Norris Road  
Bakersfield, California 93308-2231

July 6, 2015

The Honorable John S. Somers, Presiding Judge  
Kern County Superior Court  
1415 Truxtun Avenue  
Bakersfield, CA. 93301

On June 11, 2015, the Kern County Grand Jury published the County of Kern 2014-2015 Grand Jury Final Report: Kern County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue (SAR), Air Support Unit (ASU), Bomb Squad, and K-9 Unit.

I would like to express my appreciation to the Grand Jury for its efforts in reviewing the Kern County Sheriff's Office Search and Rescue (SAR), Air Support Unit (ASU), Bomb Squad, and K-9 Unit.

The objective review provided by the Grand Jury helps to strengthen the foundation of trust between the community and the Sheriff's Office. As always, the Sheriff's Office appreciates the valuable insight the Grand Jury has provided.

**GRAND JURY FINDINGS:**

- F1. *The Bakersfield Search and Rescue Team are currently in the process of establishing the SAR Medical Team and it should be operational within the next 6-12 months.*
- F2. *The Indian Wells Mine Rescue Team is currently suspended due to insufficient staffing to perform mine/confined space rescue. Team members have been absorbed by other teams (Tehachapi and Kern Valley).*
- *The feasibility of reestablishing the team will be discussed at a future SAR Captains' meeting*
- F3. *New Bomb Squad equipment is budgeted and distributed on an as-needed basis. Future years' acquisitions will depend on the budget.*

- F4. *The Bomb Squad has worked with vendors to design a truck that will meet desired specifications. The current vehicle appears to have inadequate space with little room once all equipment is loaded.*
- F5. *Funding for a new vehicle has been sought through OES. Unused grant funds from previous fiscal years across the State have also been sought. This has been unsuccessful.*
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July 6, 2015

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#### **KERN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE RESPONSE TO FINDINGS:**

The Kern County Sheriff's Office concurs with each and every one of the Grand Jury's findings (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10, F11, F12, F13, F14, F15, F16, F17, and F18).

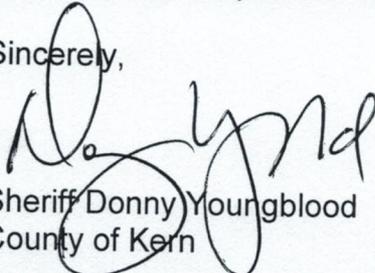
#### **GRAND JURY RECOMMENDATION:**

- R1. The Bomb Squad should continue to search for grants that may provide for a much needed updated vehicle and other equipment. (Finding 3, 4 and 5)

#### **KERN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION:**

This recommendation is continuously explored. The Sheriff's Office continuously explores the possibility of securing State and/or Federal grants for the purchase of a new, updated Bomb Squad vehicle. The Sheriff's Office also continuously evaluates its annual budgets for the possibility of including the purchase and/or lease of a new, updated Bomb Squad vehicle into the annual operating budget.

Sincerely,

  
Sheriff Donny Youngblood  
County of Kern

July 6, 2015

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cc: Undersheriff RoseMary Wahl  
Chief Deputy Shelly Castaneda  
Chief Deputy Curtis Cornelison  
Chief Deputy Brian Wheeler  
Chief Deputy Kevin Zimmermann  
Clerk of the Board  
Kern County Grand Jury Foreman  
Assistant CAO Teresa Hitchcock

Kern County Board of Supervisors  
Response to Grand Jury Final Report  
Kern County Sheriff's Office Emergency Services

Response to Findings:

The Board of Supervisors notes that the Grand Jury's findings are substantially correct.

Response to Recommendations:

R1: *The Bomb Squad should continue to search for grants that may provide for a much needed updated vehicle and other equipment.*

We concur with the Sheriff's response that they will continue to explore the possibility of securing grants for the purchase of an updated Bomb Squad vehicle and other equipment.