



Gang enforcement being stepped up by Portland Police for summer

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By



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Chief Mike Reese said extra officers are being assigned to the Portland Police Gang Enforcement Team because "I can't imagine anything more important than having a safe summer."

Heading into the summer months, Portland police are beefing up the bureau's gang enforcement team and its gun task force.

Starting June 21 and running through Sept. 21, the bureau will add 14 officers, two detectives, a sergeant and a lieutenant to its 25-member gang enforcement team.

The officers will be pulled out of patrol districts from the bureau's three precincts, as well as the Drugs and Vice Division, the Training Division and Family Services Division. Even the chief said he'd work gang enforcement this summer.

The bureau's four-member Gun Task Force will be doubled with the addition of four more officers.

Officers from some specialty divisions, such as school resource officers, will be asked to backfill the precinct patrol shifts.

"We're a lean organization. Sometimes it's a little bit like moving the deck chairs on the Titanic," Police Chief Mike Reese said. "There's impact always when we move resources, but I can't imagine anything more important than having a safe summer."

Reese was joined by the mayor, state and federal prosecutors, and gang outreach workers at Holladay Park Thursday morning.

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The Oregonian's continuing coverage of suspected gang shootings in Portland in 2012.

Mayor Sam Adams called the increased enforcement combined with community prevention efforts "Operation Safe Summer."

So far this year, the Gang Violence Response Team has been called out to 59 gang-related violence calls in the city. That's up from 47 at this time last year, and 40 in 2010.

As of June 8 this year, there have been 57 gang-related shootings, compared to 36 during the same period in 2011.

"Gun and gang violence in the City of Portland are too high," Adams said. "But we also know it could be worse."

Adams named other cities, including Seattle and Chicago, that have experienced a dramatic rise in shootings this year.

"We don't want it to get that bad here," Adams added.

Portland Capt. Ron Alexander, who oversees the Gang Enforcement Team, said the increase in city gang shootings over the past three years has been difficult "for us to get a handle on." The shootings are not concentrated in one area, but spread out across the city.

"We're ramping up," Alexander told a Gang Violence Task Force meeting last week. "We're going to have a lot more contacts with people."

U.S. Attorney Amanda Marshall said she's added three more prosecutors for a total of four federal prosecutors dedicated to handling gang-related gun prosecutions of felons in possession of a firearm. Her prosecutors will be at police roll calls and remain in constant contact with officers on the street.

"It is really critical the effort to gear up and be proactive and get bodies on the street to address this problem at a very critical time," she said.

The officials held the news conference at Holladay Park to highlight the positive impact that the community-based group Connected, started by veteran gang outreach worker John Canda, has had in reducing gang violence and drug sales in the park.

Every Friday night, Canda has led a group of men and women who volunteer to walk in the park and through the neighboring Lloyd Center mall to talk to youth, break up fights and deter problems.

Pastor Matt Hennessey has been among the volunteers. He also is involved in the local faith-based group 11-45, whose members are walking through various parks and city hot spots to provide a visible presence.

Hennessey said he hopes the stepped-up attention to gang violence continues throughout the year, and "is not just a summer effort."

Hennessey said he would hope the efforts will "make this one of the quietest summers Portland has ever seen."

– **Maxine Bernstein**

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