

Biennial Survey

Community Assessment of Policing and Public Safety in the City of Seattle

2009 Survey Report

City of Seattle
Office of Policy & Management
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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results and findings of the 2009 Neighborhood Policing Survey. This survey was first conducted in 2003 as a component of the Seattle Police Department's overall strategy to improve public confidence and trust in the police and enhance police-community relations¹. The survey is designed to assess public opinion regarding police effectiveness and police misconduct, and measure the quantity and quality of contacts between Seattle police officers and Seattle residents. By conducting the survey every two years, changes in public attitudes can be measured and the impacts of police initiatives can be assessed.

In 2003 the Vera Institute of Justice developed the first survey instrument, conducted the telephone survey and issued a report on the results. The telephone survey was conducted by the Jackson Organization in 2005 and EMC Research in 2007 and 2009. Modifications to the survey instrument were made each year but a core group of questions remained unchanged so that trends in attitudes and contacts could be tracked.

Questions or comments about the research may be directed to:

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¹ The plan was announced by Mayor Greg Nickels in July 2002 and includes the following components:

- Installing video cameras in all police patrol cars.
- Documenting traffic stops by police officers where a warning was issued.
- Holding community forums in each of the city's precincts.
- Reviewing and updating the 19 hours of training of recruits focused specifically on racial sensitivity, as well as strengthen the mandatory ongoing training officers receive each year.
- Expanding the Office of Professional Accountability's ability to record and analyze complaints alleging that racially-based policing has occurred.
- Revising the police department's policy directive on racially biased policing based upon a national model developed by the Police Executive Research Forum.
- Documenting information on consent searches.
- Conducting a valid and reliable survey of city residents every other year to measure attitudes about police interactions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The sample size for the 2009 survey was 700 Seattle residents.

Neighborhood Quality

An overwhelming majority of residents said they live in a good or excellent neighborhood and feel safe in their neighborhood at night.

- 87% rated their neighborhood as “good” or “excellent” and only 2% said the quality of their neighborhood was poor.
- 79% said they feel safe walking alone in their neighborhood at night.

Crime in the Neighborhood

A majority of Seattle residents do not believe that the level of crime has changed in their neighborhood in the last two years. However, nearly three times as many people think the crime rate is going up than think it is going down.

- While 60% believe that the level of crime has not changed, more people think that crime is rising (26%) rather than falling (9%).
- The most frequently mentioned serious crime problems are burglary (44%) and auto theft (25%).

Police Activity Observed in the Neighborhood

A majority of Seattle residents believe that the level of police protection in their neighborhood has stayed the same in the last two years.

- 69% believe the level of police protection has stayed the same but more than twice as many people think that the level of protection has gone up (19%) as those who think it has gone down (7%).

Voluntary Contact with Seattle Police

Nearly half of Seattle residents have called the police for assistance or worked together with the police in the last year.

- 21% reported a crime, 17% reported an emergency, 14% reported a suspicious person or circumstance and 14% worked with police on crime prevention activities.
- For those who reported a crime, 79% thought the officer treated them professionally and respectfully and 64% felt the officer responded promptly.
- Residents were most satisfied with police involvement in crime prevention activities (89%) and with police response to non-crime emergencies (85%). Those who reported a suspicious circumstance (72%) or a crime (66%) to the police had a lower level of satisfaction with the police response.

Involuntary Contact with Seattle Police

Nearly one in six Seattle residents was stopped by the police in the last year. Most of those stopped by the police believed that the officer behaved appropriately during the stop and they were satisfied with the encounter.

- 78% of drivers stopped by Seattle police said the officer treated them professionally and respectfully.
- 80% of drivers felt the officer had a valid reason for stopping them.
- 77% of drivers were satisfied with the encounter.
- Pedestrians who have been stopped by the police were less likely to believe that the officer behaved appropriately and were less satisfied with the encounter than those who were stopped while driving.
- Perceptions of police conduct during traffic stops have improved for most measures of performance in the last two years. The level of satisfaction with traffic stops and pedestrian stops has also increased.

General Opinions of Police Effectiveness

In 2009 Seattle residents rated the overall effectiveness of the Seattle police at the highest level since the surveys began in 2003.

- 89% believe that police deal with residents in their neighborhood in a fair and courteous manner.
- 79% feel the police are effective at dealing with problems that concern people in the neighborhood
- 77% feel that police promptly respond to emergency calls for assistance.
- 77% believe that police do a good job preventing crime.
- 72% think that police are helpful to crime victims

General Opinions of Police Misconduct

One in four Seattle residents believes that some type of police misconduct is a major problem in the Seattle police department but the concerns about racial profiling and stopping people without good reason have lessened since the 2003 survey.

- 44% feel that police using excessive force is a problem.
- 43% believe that racial profiling is a major or minor problem.
- 37% feel that police stopping people without a good reason is a problem.

Level of Respect for Seattle Police

Most Seattle residents have a very high level of respect for Seattle police officers.

- 93% said they had a lot of respect or some respect for the police.
- Only 2% said they had a lot of disrespect for the police.
- Between 2005 and 2009 those who said they had a lot of respect for the police increased from 42% to 56%.

The 2007 and 2009 surveys asked residents if there were any parts of Seattle that they avoided because of a fear of crime. More than half of the respondents said there were areas of the city that they avoided because they felt unsafe. Respondents were then asked to name those areas of concern. Because this was an open-ended question, a wide variety of responses was given. Some identified a specific street, while others named neighborhoods or large regions of the city (e.g., south Seattle). Each respondent was allowed to list multiple areas of concern. The specific responses were grouped into generally identifiable areas of the city and the top areas of concern are shown in the following figure.

Figure 5: Are there certain parts of Seattle that you avoid because of a fear of crime or your personal safety?

