



2016 in Review: Annual crime statistics and complaint data

For the fourth year in a row, the Menlo Park Police Department releases its annual crime statistics and public complaint data. This annual crime report is available online.

In 2016, the police department responded to over 21,000 calls for service, conducted over 8,175 traffic stops, wrote more than 3,900 reports and arrested nearly 1,300 individuals. The resulting 2016 crime statistics showed a 7 percent decrease in violent crimes from 2015, which consists of homicide, rape, robbery and aggravated assault. The violent crime rate has continued to decrease over the four year period. Property crimes rose slightly (1 percent) in comparison to 2015, which involves burglary, larceny, auto theft and arson.

The police department remains committed to working with our community partners, Menlo Park residents and businesses, toward the goal of a safer city. We continue to work proactively with the community and our efforts led the City to being a finalist for the 2016 James Q. Wilson Award for Excellence in Community Policing and recipient of the 2016 International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and Cisco Systems Community Policing Award in the category for populations of 20,001 to 50,000 residents.

In 2013, the Police Chief committed to transparency by annually reporting the outcome of complaints filed against our personnel. In addition, crime statistics are made available on our website. In 2015, the Menlo Park Police Department was the first San Mateo County police agency to join the White House Data Initiative and release datasets that include calls for service, traffic stops and personnel demographic information including sex, race and education level. All police officers and sergeants have been wearing body cameras since 2014 in an effort to strengthen officers' performance and accountability, enhance department transparency, document encounters with the public, and investigate and resolve complaints and officer-involved incidents.

In 2016, the Menlo Park Police Department received 26 public complaints out of 38,032 officer contacts. In 2015, 24 public complaints were received out of 39,771 officer contacts. When reviewing personnel complaints, it is important to look at the number and types of service calls officers respond to within the evaluated period. It is inevitable that with 38,032 public contacts, there will be situations where a member of the public is not satisfied with the service received and has justification to file a complaint. The number one complaint filed in 2016 was for procedural errors (11 complaints). Out of the 26 complaints filed:

- Five were sustained (19.2%),
- One was not sustained (3.8%)
- Six were exonerated (23.1%),
- Four are still currently under investigation or pending (15.4%),
- Four concluded with no finding; the complainant did not provide necessary information to continue the investigation (15.4%),
- One was frivolous (3.8%),

- Two were unfounded (7.7%), and
- Three were withdrawn (11.5%) by the complainant before the investigation was completed.

The use of body cameras has allowed supervisors to review incidents mentioned by complainants immediately. This review allows for an examination of a situation as it happened based upon the facts, as opposed to recollection.

A sustained finding means that evidence from the internal investigation indicated the complaint was founded. Of the sustained complaints, two were procedural and three were for discourtesy.

For a complaint to be exonerated there must be proof that the officer's actions were consistent with department policies and protocols. This occurs quite frequently since all officers now wear audio and video recorders.

For a complaint to be determined unfounded, it must be demonstrated that the alleged actions did not occur or did not involve our personnel. For a frivolous complaint finding as set forth in Penal Code 832.5, and defined in Civil Code 128.5, is a complaint that is "totally and completely without merit" or is taken "for the sole purpose of harassing [the peace officer]."

Law enforcement officers contact the public in several ways, including response to calls received by the dispatch center, flag downs or requests made in public, and officer initiated activities (which range from traffic to pedestrian stops). Not all service calls result in written reports or citations. Officers use their discretion, experience, knowledge of laws/policies and communication skills to resolve situations.

The calls for service do not reflect the frequent number of walk-ins to the police lobby and phone calls where professional staff, including administration, records and parking, provides services directly (i.e., police report copies, vehicle releases, parking enforcement/permits, media inquiries, property/evidence, etc.)

With all this factored into the equation, 26 complaints per year is an acceptable number, but we will always strive toward zero.