



BRAINS — OVER — GALLONS

Agencies look for ways to save at the pump

/Kelly Foreman, Public Information Officer

Kentucky law enforcement agencies over the past year have been forced to creatively balance swelling fuel bills with unyielding budgets. And while fuel prices may have fallen for now, many still are bracing for the possibility of the inevitable next hike in our unstable economy.

In addressing those changes, some officers have found that their efforts to combat the growing expense also have led, in many cases, to more effective and efficient policing.

The Bullitt County Sheriff's Office is one of those agencies. The office's 30 road deputies police more than 299 square miles of county, said Chief Deputy Danny Thompson, an area large enough to force on-duty deputies to consume a lot of gas. Last year, Thompson said the office had to increase its gasoline budget by more than \$40,000.

"It wouldn't be hard to imagine a guy being in Mount Washington on the east side of the county and getting a call 26 miles away to Knob Creek," Thompson said.

After looking at the number of calls coming into the county's dispatch center requesting a police presence where it was not necessarily required, Thompson said Bullitt County Sheriff

Donald Tinnell decided to try answering some calls with a phone call from a deputy.

"People pick up the phone and call 911 for everything," Thompson said. "A lot of times it is a barking dog. Most people just want somebody to talk to."

Road supervisors now are monitoring calls to determine if it is appropriate to dial back callers who may not need them on scene to solve their problem. So far, Thompson said the community has been receptive to the initiative and the office has received no complaints. However, there are some disadvantages. The decrease in deputies driving around the county also means citizens see fewer patrols.

"We have to be cognizant of being seen," Thompson said.

The sheriff also is mindful of those citizens who want to see a uniformed officer on their doorstep when they dial 911.

"It is a better use of our time," Thompson said. "I think people understand that. ... But if it is urgent, most people want to see an officer now. And if that is the case, we don't question it. We just go."

Answering calls with phone calls is just one thing the sheriff's office has done to try to curb >>

>> its fuel costs. For three hours each day, some deputies are doubling up in one patrol vehicle. As often as possible the office is conducting stationary patrols and there has been discussion about purchasing more fuel-efficient vehicles for process servers and the transport deputy, Thompson said.

Each month, Thompson posts a spreadsheet that lists the amount of fuel consumption, by deputy, so that officers also can be aware of how much gas they are burning. The initiatives are better than the alternative, Thompson said, which would be to charge deputies for the use of home-fleet vehicles while they are off duty.

"We consider [home fleet] one of the few benefits we can offer and we are trying to avoid [charging for] it," he said.

Kentucky State Police

On any given day, the Kentucky State Police could have about 1,000 vehicles on the roadway, said KSP Lt. Phil Crumpton.

"If they burn 10 gallons of gas, you're looking at 10,000 gallons a day," he said.

Across the state's 16 posts, Crumpton said fuel consumption hit more than \$566,000 in May. Through gas-saving initiatives, it dropped by \$3,000 the following month.

During the past year, Crumpton said officials have worked hard to limit the number of miles troopers are driving to keep the gas figures going down. Through scaling back patrols, using stationary radar patrols whenever possible and looking at more gas-efficient vehicles for non-patrol personnel, Crumpton said the state police this year has been able to conserve about 100,000 gallons of gas more than in fiscal year 2007.

"We haven't cut back any services to anyone and do not anticipate doing so," Crumpton said. "We are just trying to be as wise as we can with the money we have."

The merger of KSP and Kentucky Vehicle Enforcement has helped save the state money on gas through the consolidation of facilities and services, but Crumpton said the gas savings were not ultimately a deciding issue on the merger.

"Everyone is just kind of doing whatever they can to cut back on fuel consumption," he said. "It is something we all have to be concerned about as it keeps going up."

While the gas figures for the second largest police agency in the state are mind-boggling, smaller agencies also are struggling with their smaller budgets.

In Alexandria, a city policed by little more than a dozen officers, the 2007-2008 gas budget just didn't cut it.

"Last year for the 2007-2008 budget year, we budgeted \$48,000 and we spent \$65,000," said Alexandria Police Lt. George Schreiner. "So it was considerably higher. This year, the 08-09 budget year, we budgeted \$65,000, but are fully expecting to go over that as well. By how much, I don't know.

"We got the bill for July 08 and ... we spent \$7,384, just in fuel," Schreiner said.

If prices had lingered around what they were in July, the department would have spent more than \$88,000 in fuel during the fiscal year. But – with the combination of the recent drop in prices and the measures put in place to prevent the excessive overage – Schreiner is hopeful the department will come closer to meeting the budget.

Like many agencies, Schreiner said the department has purchased three new Dodge Chargers to take advantage

Law enforcement agencies in Kentucky and across the nation are looking for ways to save money at the pump. These are a few examples of what departments are doing now:

- Speeders in Holly Springs, Ga. are paying an extra \$12 to the Holly Springs Police Department – a charge for the gas used to chase them down.
- Officers in Shelby, N.C. are parking their cars for 15 minutes every two hours. They also have been asked to stop taking patrol cars out for lunch.
- In Florida, the Miramar Police Department has asked officers to ensure their vehicles have regular tune-ups, have fluid levels checked and properly inflated tires.
- Indiana State Police are turning the engines off in their cars while they are parked.
- Tompkinsville police are conducting fewer patrols in areas where they do not receive a lot of calls.
- The Lakewood, Colo. Police Department is replacing old vehicles with E-85 fuel-capable patrol vehicles in hopes that as the majority of the city's fleet becomes capable, the city will put an E-85 fuel pump in place to realize the savings.
- Florida's Lauderhill Police Department is switching from SUVs to Crown Victorias and from the Crown Vics to smaller vehicles.
- Atlanta police have proposed adding a surcharge to moving violation tickets.
- Suwanee and Gainesville police departments in Georgia have encouraged more foot patrols.
- Owensboro police launched a study to audit gas usage and examine ways to conserve.
- Aurora, Colo. police have been ordered not to idle and put two officers in one car.
- Jeffersonton police have refrained from filling four police officer positions and are looking at hybrid vehicles.

This information was gathered by DOCJT Intern Emily McGuire from various news reports printed by the New York Times, Time Magazine, KWGN-TV, KLC Direct, the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, Louisville Courier-Journal and Glasgow Daily Times. ■



/Photos by Elizabeth Thomas

▲ Alexandria Police Chief Mike Ward approached the local school system to help with the department's struggling fuel budget. On average, the department saves 50 cents per gallon over what it would spend purchasing retail gasoline.

of the Hemi engines and LED light bars that require less gas. The Chargers cost about \$800 more than the traditional Ford Crown Victorias, but Schreiner said the long-term gas savings easily make the cars a cheaper buy.

"It runs on four cylinders in the city and when you need the extra power, it runs on eight [cylinders]," Schreiner said.

Before gas reached the \$3 retail mark, Schreiner said Alexandria's chief approached the local school system for help.

"Chief [Mike] Ward approached the school board to see if we could purchase our gas through them and they were very accommodating," Schreiner said. "They said, 'Yeah, that's not a problem. We will just have to order more.'"

The cost difference from retail to the school system averages about 50 cents per gallon in savings, Schreiner

said. It is an option Schreiner recommends to any agency.

"If the agency has the ability to work out a similar arrangement with their school system – that was an unbelievable move," he said. "Again, you are not paying the tax and you are not paying the mark up. A lot of agencies will have their own pumps and obviously that is the easiest way to go, but if you don't, the school system is the place to look because if they have buses, they are going to have to have fuel."

Losing lead feet

The concept to save gas for Bannock County, Idaho Sheriff Lorin Nielsen was simple – slow down.

"We started this in June of this year," Nielsen said in a telephone interview. "That's when we realized that we were probably going to spend all the money." >>

BY THE NUMBERS

\$6.00

Average cost of jet fuel (averaged numbers from Kentucky State Police)

19

Average miles per gallon for a Ford Crown Victoria police cruiser

27

Average miles per gallon for a Chevrolet Impala police cruiser

\$13,973.80

Total cost of fuel spent by Department of Criminal Justice Training in 2007 training police officers and recruits

\$1,333.12

To date, the monthly average fuel cost spent on training police officers and recruits



The fiscal year in Bannock County runs from one October to the next and Nielsen said at the first of June this year he realized almost 85 percent of his fuel budget was gone.

“And we still had at least a quarter and a half,” he said. “We are not a real large office and we had heard that if you just slow down you are going to save miles per gallon.”

After discussing options to save fuel, Nielsen said he asked his deputies on a voluntary basis to slow down. The maximum speed limit on Bannock County’s two major interstates is 75 miles per hour, he said, and unless the deputies were heading to a call, Nielsen asked them to stay under 65 mph. In the city, he asked them to drive five miles under the speed limit to see how much it would save.

In two months, Nielsen said the department’s 42 patrolling deputies helped save an estimated \$14,000 to \$20,000.

“Even if the prices go down, I think I’m going to stick with this plan,” he said. “There is no need to do the maximum speed limit. It has worked out very well and I think the guys are going to be doing it.”

“And there is another method to my madness,” Nielsen said. “I found when patrol cars slow down, most of the traffic does, too. But all kidding aside, when we are out patrolling, we really do need to be patrolling. When you are doing 10 miles under [the speed limit], in the urban areas you also have a chance to observe, which is what you’re supposed to be doing.”

Emerging technology

Administrators in Marietta, Ga. looking to cut costs have found that segway-type vehicles not only accomplish that goal, but also get officers on the streets and out of their cars.

In June, the Marietta department purchased two T3 series vehicles from California-based T3 Motion, Inc. The carts, which cost just under \$9,000 are electrical and “kind of resemble a Roman chariot,” said Mark Bishop, the department’s public information officer.

“They are kind of an elevated platform so when you are on them you are able to see above,” Bishop said. “Like, if you are in a crowd, you can see above the crowd walking around. So it gives you better visual acuity. They also have blue lights, sirens, running

lights, so they can be used on streets and or in apartment complexes on sidewalks and things of that nature.”

The vehicles use swappable batteries like a cordless drill and can run from four to 10 hours depending on a rider’s weight, average speed and terrain, according to product information supplied by T3. The vehicles can reach speeds of up to 20 miles per hour and have a cargo capacity of 450 pounds.

The T3 company boasts an average savings of more than \$25,000 annually over gas-powered vehicles, an average operating cost of 10 cents per day and equivalent of more than 500 miles per gallon based on national gas price averages and other figures.

Marietta is home to a community lined wall-to-wall with apartment complexes and strip-mall shopping complexes where the vehicles have been particularly useful, Bishop said.

“We have used them a lot in there – areas where a patrol car is really too cumbersome to patrol,” he said. “We do still catch 911 calls from these things. We can use them in an area and get to calls pretty quick on those that on foot would just about be impossible.”

The MPD has not been able to quantify the savings the T3 carts have garnered yet because of the short period of time they have been in use. But Bishop said the department has been pleased with them.

“It is just an alternate patrol technique as well,” he said. “I mean, we have bicycles, we do have motorcycles, of course we have your standard police cruisers – and now we have these.”

Each agency has to find the option that best suits their budget and individual needs. While the changes may sometimes be difficult, there essentially are two bottom lines to the gas crisis – fuel is not getting any cheaper and law enforcement still has to patrol.

“The alternative is that the officers are going to get cut somewhere,” Nielsen said. “It is better than having them park their vehicles and just kind of watch crime go by.” J



▲ Covington Police bike patrol officers Sgt. Jim Donaldson, left, Ptl. Jim West, center, and Ptl. Justin Tucker patrol the streets of Covington. A squad of 12 have helped the department keep its gas costs down.

Covington police save on gas with bike patrol

When gas prices began to rise in Covington, the department of more than 115 officers doubled the size of its bike patrol to help save money.

Not only has the squad of 12 – 16 if you include the community relations bike riders – already saved the department money on gas, they also have given the community exactly what they asked for, said Covington Police Assistant Chief Spike Jones.

Covington is one of more than 80 Kentucky agencies that has a bike patrol unit. Yet, different from most police bike patrols, Covington has dropped their mountain bikes in favor of cyclo-cross bicycles, said the unit’s sergeant, Jim Donaldson.

“We prefer to use the term half,” Donaldson said in reference to the bikes. “It is half road bike, half off-road bike. But when you get into the halves, it is also half the weight of a mountain bike because there is no suspension on it anywhere. The tires are half the size so you have half the rolling resistance. You have half the weight in the gear systems but you have double the handling. And the speed is just ridiculous. ...

“But what it gives us is the ability to require that officer to answer calls and be responsible for a beat and be responsible for a sector,” Donaldson said. “... In the snow and the mud – and we ride them year round, there is no

season for our bike guys – the snow and the mud, these bikes eat it up.”

Jones said the department began increasing the bike patrol about a year ago when the trends of the national economy began leading to tighter gas budgets for law enforcement agencies. Police departments have to count their fuel cost in hours, not miles, Jones said, to determine how much gas their cruisers really are using.

Donaldson agreed.

“My beat partners on a decent summer day, a busy day, you have to figure ball games going on – they used a half a tank of gas for that a day,” Donaldson said of a time when he was working downtown on his bike with other officers in cars. “I didn’t get gas. I mean, I would get a half a tank of gas every week and I take my car home.”

That was when Donaldson was riding alone, he said. Based on Donaldson’s figures and the addition of 11 bike patrol officers, the department now is saving an estimated \$110,000 in gas each year by using the bike patrol.

“We are always going to have to have officers in patrol cars. That is just a fact of life,” Jones said.

However, citizens appreciate Donaldson and the bike patrol “because, number one, he is available. He is not barricaded behind glass and steel. He is in your face and that is what neighborhoods want. They really want people they can walk out and stop and communicate with and by the same token, they (the bike patrol) can get in an alley somewhere and nobody will ever know.” ■