

NEWS

FOR RELEASE

CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

IMMEDIATE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM MICHIGAN CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION INVESTIGATION OF STRESS UNIT - DETROIT POLICE DEPARTMENT

DETROIT, Nov. 13 — The Michigan Civil Rights Commission issued the following statement at a press conference today:

As a result of the expressions of public concern following the September 17 slaying of two Detroit youths by a Detroit Police officer, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission directed that an investigation be conducted into the activities and procedures of the STRESS (Stop The Robberies—Enjoy Safe Streets) program operated by the Department.

The STRESS program was initiated on January 13, 1971, to combat street crimes through the use of low-visibility police teams. This concept involved the assignment of officers who function unobtrusively in neighborhoods where street crimes are being committed in order to apprehend persons in the process of committing criminal acts. The two basic functional techniques employed by STRESS are decoy and surveillance. According to Department officials, the surveillance technique accounts for approximately 80% of the STRESS unit's activities, and 97% of the effected arrests. The decoy method is utilized in 20% of STRESS activities and accounts for 3% of the total arrests effected.

As of this date, eleven (11) citizens have been killed by STRESS officers. Ten of these fatalities occurred in instances where the decoy method was being employed. Ten of the eleven victims were black.

This central finding coupled with the recruitment of officers to the STRESS unit from personnel who volunteer, make modifications in the unit's operations imperative. Our review disclosed that one officer and several of his partners participated in a total of seven of the eleven STRESS fatalities. This same officer had been involved in a relatively larger number of citizen-officer injury incidents prior to joining STRESS. Another officer was assigned to STRESS while awaiting a Trial Board Hearing on charges of mistreating a black prisoner, although he was subsequently exonerated.

Police Department statistics indicate that crimes of robbery have decreased where STRESS has been assigned, but there is no indication that the decrease is attributable to the employment of the decoy technique.

Based on this preliminary review, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission has directed the following recommendations to the Detroit Police Department:

1. That the decoy method be immediately discontinued as a STRESS technique.
2. That in order to attain a highly professional unit, the Detroit Police Department must thoroughly screen all officers volunteering for the STRESS unit prior to assignment. This screening process should also include those officers who are currently assigned, and reassignment should be made where performance records warrant.
3. That officers with a disproportionate number of citizen complaints and/or citizen injury contacts must be disqualified from STRESS duty. An officer's length of service and the nature of his assignments may be included as two of the factors' in determining what constituted a disproportionate number of complaints or contracts.
4. That more black officers be assigned to STRESS so that teams can be racially integrated wherever feasible.
5. That the Detroit Police Department, in its screening process, will take into consideration officer's involvement in the Michigan Civil Rights Commission complaint activity and any other activities which raise questions of any officer's qualifications to effectively serve in a highly sensitive position. Upon request from the Detroit Police Department, the Michigan Civil Rights Commission will provide the Department will provide the Department with information regarding officer's involvement in complaint activity.
6. That the Michigan Civil Rights Commission staff will participate in human relations training programs, particularly for STRESS officers.
7. That an officer on each team be officially designated as the crew chief of the team. The designation of crew chief will be based on ability, merit and skill in performing in a highly sensitive position.
8. That the Detroit Police Department will petition the Common Council for funds to enable the purchase of communication devices for STRESS officers.

Since the Commission's review of STRESS activities was begun on October 11, the Detroit Police Department has taken steps to keep records indicating the number of shots fired by individual STRESS officers, and is requiring that activity logs be kept during tours of duty. It is the Commission's hope that such administrative scrutiny will result in affirmative and timely action on the Commission's recommendations.

The STRESS unit has been the source of much community tension and controversy. It has come under criticism from the Detroit Urban League, the Commission on Community Relations, and various citizen groups.

It has similarly had the unqualified and unquestioned support of many citizens. The Commission believes that all citizens in Detroit, black and white, are united in their concern that the streets be made safe and that effective, fair law enforcement is essential to the accomplishment of that objective. The confidence of the entire community can be maintained only if every step is taken by the Detroit Police Department to insure the highest application of professional standards in the assignment of personnel, objective and regular evaluation of the techniques being employed, and judicious use of firearms.

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