

# The Fresno Inn

(A team effort, with positive results)

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# The Fresno Inn

## SUMMARY:

The Fresno Inn is a 117-unit motel complex that incorporates three buildings located on a corner lot in the Northwest Fresno Policing District of the City of Fresno, California. Some of the problems that law enforcement experienced when responding to the motel were calls for narcotics sales and usage, pimping and prostitution, verbal and physical disturbances, multiple burglaries and receiving stolen property. Due to the size of the complex and the high visibility it received based on its location, patrol officers were responding to the site as many as six times in one day.

Originally, there were not many calls for service to the location; it averaged just over two per month, which was within acceptable levels. Within the course of six months, the Fresno Inn became a problem that all patrol officers knew about. At one point, patrol sergeants were directing officers to park in the center of the Fresno Inn to report write, in an effort to show police presence.

During the course of these problems, members of the Northwest Problem Oriented Policing (POP) unit became involved when calls for service (CFS) printouts displayed the disproportionate call increase to the location.

It was during this same time period I was contacted by patrol Officer Oliver Baines. He was one of the swing shift officers assigned to the area. Officer Baines had witnessed many of the problems, first-hand, and wanted to know what he could do to help the POP unit solve the situation at the Fresno Inn.

Coordinating with Officer Baines, we prepared a plan of attack on the Fresno Inn that included multiple facets of city resources. Included in our efforts were: patrol officers, members from the Northwest and Northeast POP units, the Special Investigations Bureau (which included vice and intelligence detectives), city code enforcement and individual city council members from the affected districts.

## Scanning:

The problems for the area included: narcotics sales and usage (primarily methamphetamine and marijuana), pimping and prostitution, verbal and physical disturbances (stemming from both the long-term tenants and the narcotics customers), burglary and receiving stolen property (including cases involving management personnel).

Additionally, during the course of identifying the various areas of concern, a bar was opened at the same location. The bar, Bud's Place, had a biker influence and was frequented by members of the Hells Angels. The east wall, the one facing the street and Highway 99, was painted and decorated in red and white (known Hells Angels colors).

There were additional complaints of prostitution activity approximately one block south of the Fresno Inn and this was also attributed to traffic from the motel. Also, a motel adjacent to the Fresno Inn began to experience a significant increase in thefts of customer's vehicles and disturbances. These were also attributed to patrons and visitors of the Fresno Inn.

The problems were identified through various methods including: crime view (a computer program that identifies calls for service), citizen complaints and patrol officer complaints. Additionally, there were citizen complaints to the affected city council members.

The problems were vast in nature, but centered around the location. It was decided to combat all crime aspects by making the location unappealing to the criminals.

## Analysis:

The problems were identified through a combination of computer crime analysis, which monitors calls for service, types of calls and citizen and police officer complaints. Additionally, some business owners also complained to city council members for their assistance and involvement in addressing the problems.

The problems escalated quickly in the latter part of 1999. The calls for service more than doubled, beginning during the summer of 1999 and continued at high levels, averaging more than twenty calls per month. At one point, patrol officers responded to the location six times in one day.

The crimes ranged from narcotics to prostitution to theft and included tenants and visitors to the Fresno Inn. Additionally, it was proven through criminal investigation the managers of the location were also involved in some of the criminal activity.

The crimes occurring at the location overflowed and affected nearby businesses. The problems included: theft and disturbances at a nearby motel and restaurant, complaints of prostitutes taking their customers to nearby business sites, littering the area with trash and narcotics paraphernalia, and a general reduction in quality of life for the legitimate tenants of the Fresno Inn and for residents in nearby surrounding areas.

As stated earlier, the problems increased at a significant pace and the area was easily identified when complaints began to surface from various sources. Prior to the POP and multi-

unit approach, patrol officers attempted to suppress the area with a high-visibility police presence.

As Officer Baines became more involved at the location, he developed multiple confidential sources. It was these same sources that were used to ultimately coordinate the efforts of the various units involved. The information collected by Officer Baines corroborated the crime analysis statistics and citizen complaints. It was Officer Baines who ultimately discovered the magnitude of the problems and the involvement of the Fresno Inn management staff.

Due to the diversity of the crimes that were occurring at the Fresno Inn, there were no specific time patterns identified. Some of the crimes, specifically the narcotics sales, occurred during both the day and night. The prostitution and pimping primarily occurred during the dark hours.

One aspect that proved to be an obstacle for investigating officers was the counter-surveillance being conducted at the location. Young children, primarily early teens and younger, were being utilized by the suspect tenants as 'look-outs' throughout the complex and the surrounding areas. Any time a stranger or a strange vehicle was seen in the area, the children would ride their bicycles around the vehicle, determine who it was, and report back to the suspect tenants standing in the parking lot, near the motel rooms. At one point, officers were conducting surveillance approximately one block away, and three children on bicycles rode over to them from the motel. The children circled the van, looked inside the windows, and then rode back to the motel and made contact with the individuals under surveillance.

Although there were no formal community meetings to discuss the problems, POP

members met with individual business owners to discuss their concerns. This approach was chosen over public announcement due to the seriousness of the criminal activity, its vast diversity and the involvement of the management staff

## Response:

The goal was to take corrective measures on all aspects of the crimes identified. This included enforcement action against tenants, visitors and the motel management staff. Both police high-visibility and undercover efforts were used at different points to make the area unwelcome for the criminal elements.

Patrol officers were assigned to the area for high-visibility, proactive enforcement. These measures included: street contact and field interrogation of anyone walking in the area, vehicle stops of all vehicles continuously driving through the area and a visible presence during as much of the day as possible (patrol sergeants began instructing officers to report write at the motel).

Members of the POP unit began multiple investigations regarding narcotics sales and usage. At one point, three search warrants were served simultaneously and multiple long-term tenants were arrested. Also, the citizen ties created by Officer Baines were facilitated by the POP officers for constant updates on any problems or concerns in the area.

Detectives from the Special Investigations Bureau, vice and intelligence, worked multiple cases on both the managers and residents of the Fresno Inn and the owners and patrons of Bud's Place. At one point, confidential informants posed as prostitutes and dealers of narcotics and stolen property. Undercover officers then posed as customers for the prostitutes working the area to both facilitate criminal investigations for the working girls and to provide foundation for the

confidential informants posing as prostitutes.

The evaluation process used for checking police progress at the location was facilitated through weekly monitoring of calls for service. The calls were screened by the POP unit to identify their source and origin. The primary concern, prior to implementation of any police efforts, was keeping the multiple investigations secret from the suspects. Additionally, there were multiple individuals providing information to Officer Baines and it was important their identities remained confidential.

The only difficulties encountered during implementation of the police response was attributed to the multiple simultaneous investigations. There was some concern because different units may have conflicting goals. Ultimately, there was only limited conflict (addressed below in the assessment portion) and none of the investigations were jeopardized.

## **Assessment:**

The majority of the search and arrest warrants were served within a two-week period in March 2000. Multiple tenants were arrested and evicted. The motel managers were also arrested from the location. Based on the results of the multiple police investigations, the POP unit was able to convince the owner of the severity of the problem (the owner did not live within the city and never viewed the state of his property first-hand).

Based on the sudden change of status at the location, the results were immediately evident. Calls for service dropped from a high of 45 calls per month to under six calls per month. Both tenants and community members that lived in the area commented on the "day and night" difference experienced.

The results were monitored formally by monitoring calls for service and informally through follow-up visits and telephone calls to surrounding businesses by the POP unit. The problems were monitored informally for approximately one month.

During this same time period, the owner was contacted and advised how to resolve the problems at the location, including proper eviction of problem tenants and additional proactive measures. Better screening of the tenants was requested, along with fencing of the property boundaries. The computerized method of monitoring calls for service through district crime analysts is continuous throughout the city, regardless of prior POP unit activity.

Some of the problems involved with this multi-unit approach involved coordinating final efforts. Obviously, each division did not want their respective investigation compromised by the results of another portion. At one point, the narcotics search warrants, scheduled for 0700 hours, were postponed at 2330 hours the evening before. This was due to fear of the possession of stolen property investigation being damaged with all of the police activity. Ultimately, all investigations were completed with positive results. None of the concerns of potential inter-unit conflict proved valid.

Due to the information provided by Officer Baines, the response was very effective in dealing with the vast criminal activity. His surveillance and information gathering made the project easy to prepare for.

The response was quick and effective. Each of the different crime elements identified were specifically addressed by either POP members, detectives or patrol officers. The only possibility identified to expedite the response was to involve the management of the location in the crime prevention. This was quickly dismissed, due to their criminal involvement.

There was not a concern with displacing the problem to another area or district because the plan was to arrest all the primary suspects involved. The zero-tolerance approach was displayed by everyone involved, including POP members, investigators and patrol officers.

## Conclusion:

The multi-faceted approach to combating crime at the Fresno Inn proved successful. Although the crime was vast in nature, many different levels of the police department teamed to battle the element. Beyond the efforts of law enforcement, members of the community, owners of local businesses and tenants of the problem motel itself, worked with police to address the concerns.

Additionally, Officer Baines, an officer with no prior POP experience, received much valuable information on the POP problem-solving process and witnessed the positive results a team-effort can provide.

In May, 2000, the Fresno Inn became a temporary housing facility for homeless veterans. The calls for service have since remained within acceptable levels. In February and March, 2001, the location received much publicity in the media regarding unpaid electrical bills. This occurred during the on-going energy crisis the state has been experiencing. Although the media coverage has been both good and bad, as of the completion of this submission, the electricity matters have been resolved and the Fresno Inn is continuing in its efforts to house homeless veterans. (See the attached newspaper article at the conclusion of this report)

Also, since the completion of the original investigations, the area the motel is located at

has been redesignated as a portion of the Southwest Policing District. During the re-alignment process, the Southwest POP officer that assumed the sector, which includes the Fresno Inn, was briefed of the vast criminal activity by the Northwest POP unit.

### Agency and Officer information:

The problem was addressed through a variety of resources ranging from field operations to investigations. The original officers involved were Northwest Police District patrol officers, specifically Officer Baines. Once the crime analysis results identified the magnitude of the problem, additional units became involved, including Northwest POP and Vice/Intelligence.

Once the Fresno Inn became a designated POP project, it was managed by Officer Martinez, Northwest POP Unit. All police enforcement beyond that point was coordinated through the Northwest POP Unit and investigations.

There were no specific incentives given for participation in the project. All units involved worked the Fresno Inn as one of their primary work assignments. There was no specialized training given to the involved officers beyond the standard POP training given to all members of the POP unit.

As stated in the summary and assessment portions of this report, the problems identified were: narcotics sales/usage, prostitution and pimping, physical and verbal disturbances, burglary and receiving stolen property. Since it was determined the managers of the Fresno Inn were involved, and the fact the owner of the property lived out of the area, all law enforcement efforts were completed without the assistance of the owner of the location. It was not until all police investigations were completed that the owner was contacted by the POP unit and advised of the

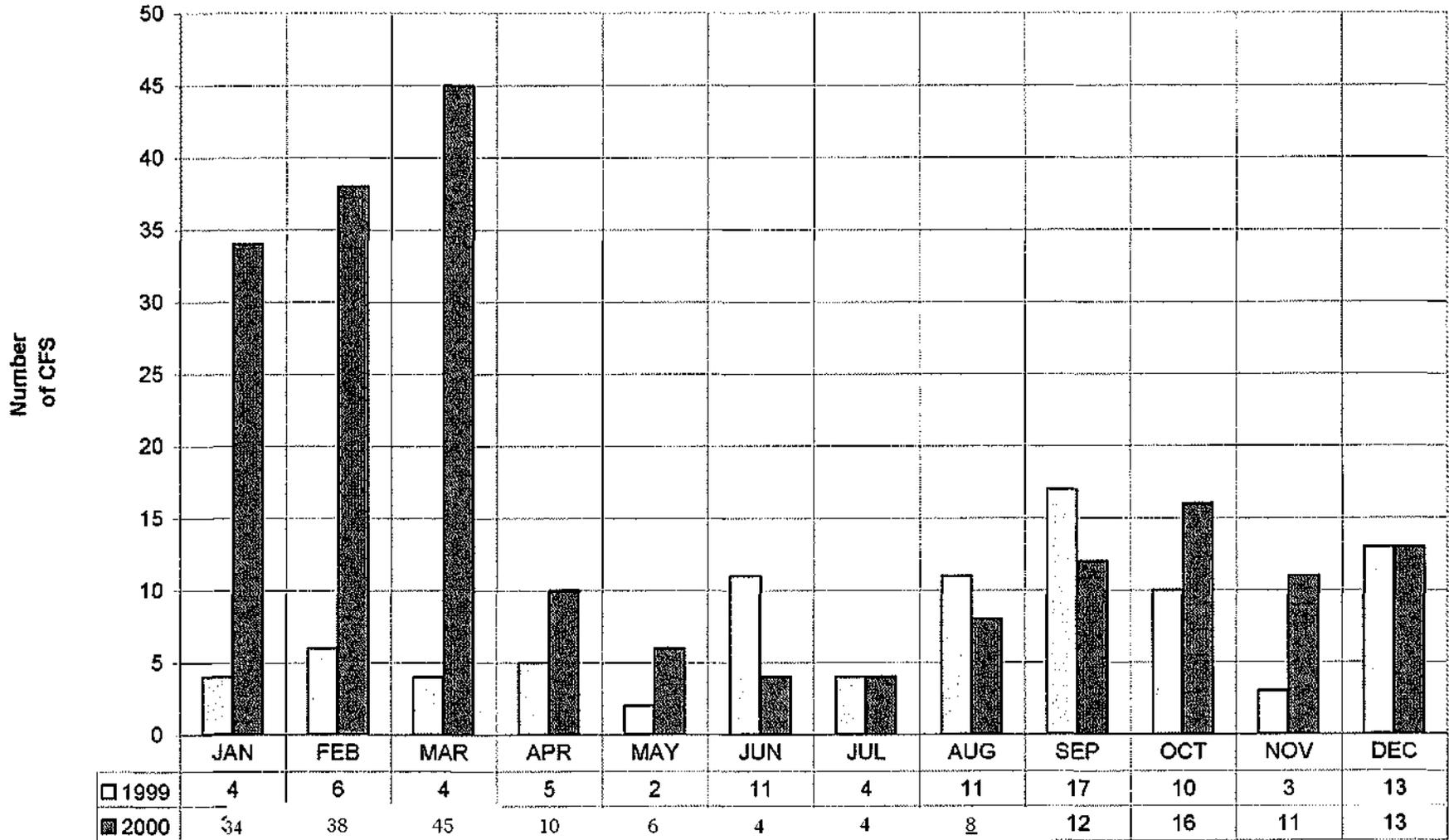
situation and what was expected of him.

All police efforts completed in regards to the Fresno Inn were completed during normal work hours. There was minimal overtime used during the various surveillance projects referenced. Some department "buy money" was used related to both the narcotics and stolen property investigations; this was less than \$500 total. The money facilitated both purchase of contraband and paying of the confidential informants involved.

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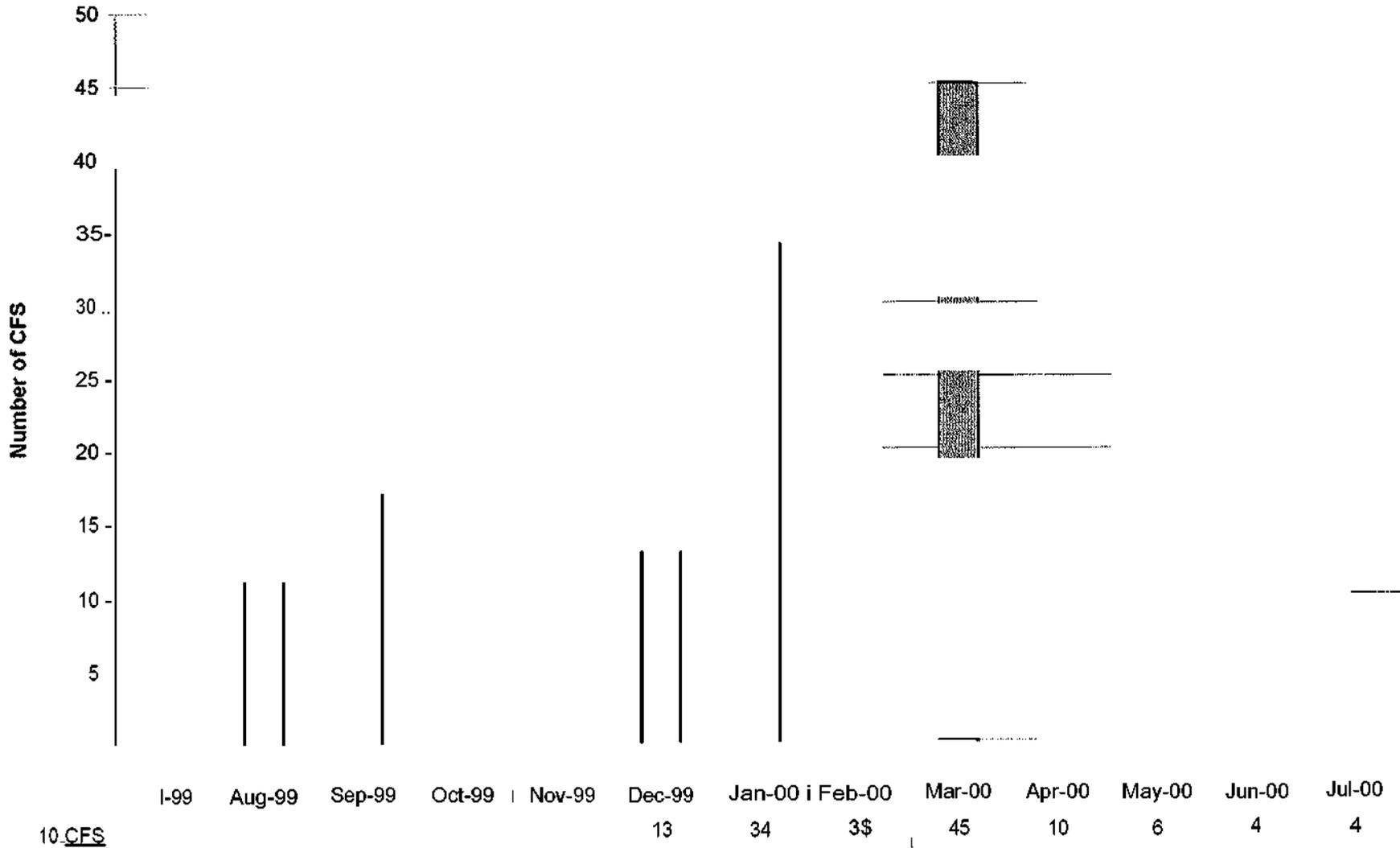
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