

Public Order and Safety

“The standard operating practices of public safety services in Greene County are to continually raise the bar, increasing value when emergency response needs are greatest.”

— Harold Bengsch,
Greene County Commissioner and Member,
Missouri State Homeland Security Advisory Council

Public order and safety are the foundations of community life and civilized society. Springfield and surrounding Greene County have built a strong foundation that supports efforts to maintain public order and enhance the safety of the community. Public and private agencies have worked the past several years to develop an integrated system of police, fire and emergency services designed to assist the community in times of need.

BLUE RIBBONS (2004 – 2007)

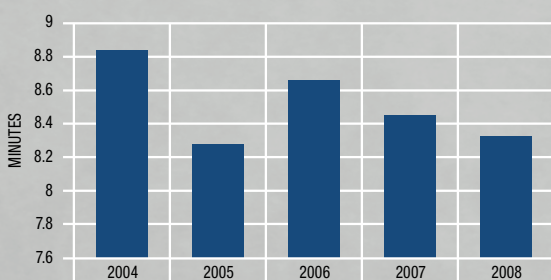
- Community Mobilization
- Law Requiring Cold and Allergy Medicines Moved to Pharmacy Counters
- 9-1-1 Sales Tax
- Crime Lab Grant
- Juvenile Offenses Decline
- Ice Storm Response
- Police Outreach
- Methamphetamine Lab Reduction

CURRENT STATUS OF 2004 – 2007 RED FLAGS

Police Response Time

Although the Springfield Police Department has a goal of arriving on the scene of the most serious calls in less than six minutes, the 2007 *Community Focus* report argued police often took longer to respond to these calls. Priority 1 response time continues to remain above six minutes for the last several years

POLICE RESPONSE TIMES—PRIORITY 1 CALLS



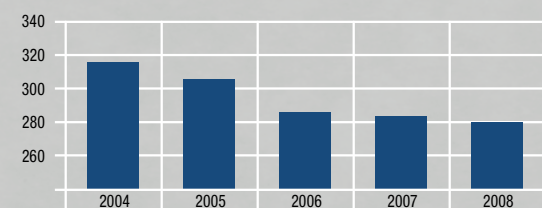
(8.92 in 2004 to 8.41 in 2008), although it has shown a downward trend in spite of a staffing shortage. This change is largely due to a focus of keeping patrol officers on the street to answer these calls at the expense of fewer officers providing service to neighborhoods. However, as more officers leave and fewer are hired, response time can be expected to increase.

Police and Fire Staffing

Due to economic difficulties and shortfalls in funding for government services, the level of police and fire service staffing has been affected. As revealed in the 2007 *Community Focus* report, area law enforcement agencies are still significantly understaffed and face ever-increasing difficulties in their attempts to fill vacancies with qualified applicants. This circumstance is especially challenging at the local level as agencies are unable to compete with the pay and benefits offered by larger departments. In addition, firehouses that serve geographical areas are being closed on a rotating basis as resources are being reduced. Inadequate staffing has a negative impact on public safety and service issues such as response time, crime prevention and the ability to assign cases for follow-up criminal investigation.

Officer attrition continues to plague staffing and the ability to continue programs. Due to a number of conditions, such as the underfunded police/fire pension and lack of competitive salary, as of June 2009, Springfield is short 36 officers from the authorized 326. The anticipation of receiving federal stimulus dollars for up to 25 officers may help in the short term and Springfield has authorized the hiring of 10 replacement officers to help with the current shortages. However, the need still exists for support personnel.

POLICE STAFFING—ANNUAL AVERAGE



Continued Methamphetamine Use

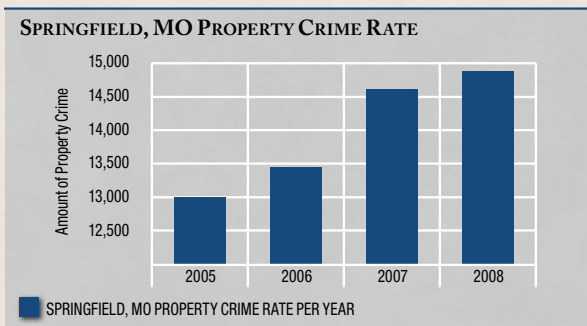
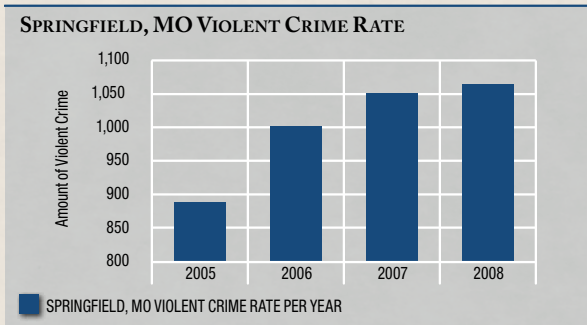
As discussed in previous *Community Focus* reports, methamphetamine continues to be a major drug problem in Springfield and the surrounding area despite the best efforts of law enforcement, treatment and education agencies. Limiting the sale of pseudoephedrine products has reduced the number of homegrown clandestine drug labs; although they have been replaced by drug trafficking from Mexico and southwestern states. More recently, local operators of clandestine labs have discovered ways to bypass the precursor legislation resulting in an increase in lab discoveries by law enforcement.

Law enforcement operations and hospital emergency room reports strongly suggest that methamphetamine use is still a very

serious regional problem. This is a community concern since methamphetamine use increases the risk of child abuse and neglect and escalates the number of property crimes in the region.

■ Rising Crime Rates

Statistics indicate a rise in violent and property crime has continued in Springfield and Greene County during the last five years. Property crime, most often associated with the narcotics and drug trade, continues to be the highest volume crime category reported to the Springfield police. Aggressive steps are being taken by the criminal justice system and community agencies to address this problem.



■ Drug Arrests for Those Under 18 Years of Age

The 2004 *Community Focus* report introduced the concern of rising drug arrests for people under 18 years of age. Partnerships among agency and community groups and a large Reclaiming the Futures grant to the Greene County Juvenile System are addressing many of the issues young people face. The declining number of drug arrests for those under 18 years of age – from 98 in 2004 to 25 in 2008 – indicates that these efforts are providing effective solutions.

■ Inadequate Jail Space

A new Greene County Justice Center (jail facility) opened in 2001 but within a few years the facility was significantly overcrowded. A criminal justice coordinating committee and citizen justice and safety commission has looked at the problem and various solutions. One solution identified as appropriate for some offenders is drug court. In fact, the Greene County Drug Courts have been instrumental in assisting defendants in obtaining treatment and employment while staying out of jail. However, the jail continues to run at maximum capacity almost daily with many offenders released prematurely to free up space.

■ Alcohol-Related Accidents

In spite of continued work by many community agencies, the number of alcohol-related accidents continues to rise with 259 in 2004 and 352 in 2008. During this period, the Springfield Police

Department DWI Unit was disbanded (due to a shortage of officers) and reassigned to other police needs.

■ High Rate of Domestic Violence

Greene County's domestic violence rate has been nearly double the state average since the 2004 *Community Focus* report. Unfortunately, the number of domestic violence assaults continues to rise (2,189 in 2004 to 2,318 in 2008) as does the number of domestic violence calls to the Springfield Police Department (2,078 in 2004 to 3,335 in 2008). Drug activity, including methamphetamine use, contributes to the high rates, although other factors are most certainly at play as well.

EMERGING ISSUES

◆ Shortage of Human and Financial Resources

Severe recession and shortfalls in Springfield's contribution to the Police and Fire Pension Fund have lead to a significant reduction in the amount of resources available to support a wide range of safety-related resources and activities. If corrective actions are not taken to address these issues and support both law enforcement and the Greene County Justice Center, the infrastructure of the community risks damage and may take years to rebuild.

◆ Inadequate Individual Disaster Preparedness

The challenge exists of adequately preparing individuals, homes and businesses in the Springfield community to respond to and recover from the increasing likelihood of a local disaster. Since 1990, Greene County has received 11 presidential disaster declarations, the third highest in the state. The widening chasm between preparedness and exposure to natural and technological hazards must be bridged with awareness and education, supported by a cohesive effort from all community agencies.

◆ Increase in Property Crimes

The continued increase in property crimes threatens the community. While the Springfield Police Department has no empirical evidence of a positive correlation between property crimes and the drug trade, there is ample anecdotal evidence to suggest this may be the case in the Springfield-Greene County area.

