

Rocky Mountain News

Overall, cops do 'excellent job'

Monitor criticizes discipline delays, traffic stop case

Rocky Mountain News

Published March 17, 2008 at 12:30 a.m.

The Denver Police Department still takes too long to impose discipline against officers in serious cases, an independent police monitor said in a report to be released today.

But the monitor, Richard Rosenthal, gave generally favorable marks to law enforcement in his 2007 annual report.

"Whatever criticism I may have lodged regarding the department of safety in this report must be tempered by the fact that the police and sheriff departments have, overall, done an excellent job in policing themselves and holding themselves accountable during the course of the year," he said.

The timeliness of administrative reviews of officer-involved shootings has "drastically improved," Rosenthal said.

But one case came under heavy criticism by Rosenthal, who said Police Chief Gerry Whitman and Manager of Safety Al LaCabe have taken more than six months to review the case, and it

remains without official findings even though the incident took place almost a year ago.

Officer Clinton Heck shot at Carlos Sanchez, a suspected armed robber who sped away in a car during a traffic stop April 4, 2007 and nearly hit Heck, who had run in front of his police car to confront Sanchez.

Denver District Attorney Mitch Morrissey determined May 7 that the officer's shooting of Sanchez was reasonable because of the threat he posed.

Rosenthal also criticized time lags in the imposition of discipline, citing delays in scheduling review hearings.

It took an average of 115 days to schedule the hearings and an average of 314 days to close cases, he said.

He criticized the police department, too, for allowing police officers who had lied in internal investigations to continue to work on assignments requiring officers to testify in court on a regular basis.

The monitor's report

For 2007, independent police monitor Richard Rosenthal found:

*** Seven on-duty officers were involved in shootings.** Five were found to involve no policy violations. One resulted in discipline for failing immediately to report the shooting to dispatch.

Rocky Mountain News

Another is still under review by Al LaCabe, Denver manager of safety.

*** Two Denver Police Department in-custody deaths.** One is still under review. The other was not found to involve policy violations.

*** One officer-involved traffic collision** that resulted in the death of a civilian and misdemeanor criminal charges against the officer.

*** Eight in-custody deaths in the Denver County Jail.** Four were by suicide, and four resulted from pre-existing medical conditions. Six did not involve policy violations. One investigation is still pending. Another is expected to result in discipline.

*** One officer-involved shooting fatality.**

*** One Denver police officer was terminated;** four resigned while disciplinary proceedings or investigations were pending.

*** Four sheriff's deputies resigned** pending disciplinary investigations.

*** For the year, 1,106 complaints were filed** against the police, compared with 1,078 in 2006. Five hundred and eighty-four complaints were filed against sheriff's deputies, compared with 388 in 2006. Rosenthal attributed the increase to more awareness among inmates of the complaint process and a change in how internal reprimands are handled.

*** Of complainants,** only 11.7 percent said they were satisfied with the complaint process in general, compared with 11.6 percent of officers.