

Rude behavior by Phoenix police targeted in programs

by **Michael Ferraresi** - Oct. 5, 2010 12:00 AM
The Arizona Republic

Phoenix police officers accused of rude behavior, cultural insensitivity and other non-violent misconduct could soon be sent to customer-service courses or mediated sessions with angry residents to correct their habits.

Internal-affairs leaders recommended that the Phoenix Police Department introduce the disciplinary programs, based on similar models used in Los Angeles and Denver, to address resident concerns about how the department handles misconduct complaints.

About 250 such complaints were filed in 2008 and another 250 in 2009.

The Phoenix Police Professional Standards Bureau sustained 135 of the allegations of officer misconduct in 2009, down 13 percent from the 155 sustained findings in 2008, according to a report to be discussed today by a City Council public-safety subcommittee.

Phoenix police internal-affairs Cmdr. Jeff Hynes said the department has "an organizational commitment" to implement education-based discipline and citizen-mediation in the next three to six months.

He said the new processes would provide greater emphasis on correcting officers' behavior while involving residents in the disciplinary process.

"I have no problem showing or examining the results of what we do," said Hynes, who oversees the Professional Standards Bureau. "It makes us a stronger or healthier organization to justify or explain our findings, or walk people through our process."

The bureau is expected to come under greater scrutiny this fall by a city-appointed citizen task force designed to make recommendations on how to improve Police Department [policies](#) and procedures. Final recommendations will be presented to the department this month in advance of public meetings in November and December.

Members of the task force, including neighborhood activists and defense attorneys, have cited the Police Department's investigative-review process as reason to develop a new system with greater public oversight.

Current police contracts provide officers the right to change some investigative findings in draft reports without public input. Police Department leaders and the Phoenix Law Enforcement Association, the union representing rank-and-file officers, defended the process as essential to protecting the rights of officers who are accused of wrongdoing.

Investigators handled 253 misconduct allegations in 2009, and 250 complaints the previous year, records show.

Police union President Mark Spencer said the union has been receptive to developing new education-based disciplinary programs to increase dialogue between officers and residents to create more transparency of how officers police their own.

"I think we need to pay attention to criticism," Spencer said. "But we don't see any flaws in the process now, and we think it's been quite successful in holding police employees accountable."

Rana Sodhi, one of 45 people assigned earlier this year to the city's police task force, said he hopes Phoenix would consider implementing stricter training on cultural sensitivity or customer-service issues at the police academy rather than sending officers to classes after a complaint has been filed.

Like other members of the task force, he worries that Phoenix is crafting a response to public concerns about police misconduct based too much on the police union's input.

"(Phoenix officers) feel like they're sheltered there under the umbrella of the union," Sodhi said. "It's nice to have that [protection](#), but the other side is the service they're providing to the public."