

**Document #:**602865

**Title:** Mobilizing a Community Response to Stalking: The Philadelphia Story

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**Attributed To:** Police Chief

**Date of Last Update:** 01/21/2009

**Summary:**

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**Document Text:**

Mobilizing a Community Response to Stalking: The Philadelphia Story

By Inspector Sonia E. Velazquez, Former Commanding Officer, Victim Services Unit, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Police Department; Michelle Garcia, Director, Stalking Resource Center, National Center for Victims of Crime, Washington, D.C.; and Elizabeth Joyce, Senior Writer, National Center for Victims of Crime, Washington, D.C.

Since the first laws against stalking were passed in the 1990s, police departments have worked to understand this crime and enforce the laws against it. To respond effectively to cases of stalking, officers must understand the nature of the crime, its legal definition, its many forms, its associations with other crimes, and its impact on victims. Yet few U.S. law enforcement agencies have distinct protocols and procedures to guide their handling of stalking cases. In 2000, the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD), recognizing the need for a more organized response to the crime, entered into a partnership with the Stalking Resource Center of the National Center for Victims of Crime (hereafter called the National Center) to implement a model stalking protocol. The partnership produced a department-wide directive, a training curriculum, and a successful community policing approach to stalking from which other departments can learn and develop their own procedures.

Unique Challenges in Responding to Stalking

Stalking differs from many other crimes in two important ways. First, because it involves repeat victimization of a targeted individual, stalking is, by its very nature, a series of acts rather than a single incident. Second, this crime is defined at least partly by its effect on the victim. Under the National Center's Model Stalking Code Revisited, "Any person who purposefully engages in a course of conduct directed at a specific person and knows or should know that the course of conduct would cause a reasonable person to (a) fear for his or her safety or the safety of a third person; or (b) suffer other emotional distress is guilty of stalking."<sup>[1]</sup> Stalking induces fear, creates uncertainty, and profoundly disrupts lives. The crime is common in relationships that involve domestic violence, past or current, and it often precedes severe, even lethal violence. Yet stalkers may also target strangers. As a result, stalking is hard to identify, investigate, and prosecute.

Stalking cases present other unique challenges to investigators:

\* Stalking behaviors are complex and varied. Stalking takes many forms, and stalkers' behavior may vary from one incident to another.

\* There is no standard psychological profile of stalkers to assist investigators. Stalkers may be motivated by anger, jealousy, revenge, fantasy, irrational love, or delusion. They may or may not have criminal records or mental illnesses.

\* When stalkers also commit domestic violence, investigations are likely to focus on the violence rather than the stalking. Compared with acts of violence, stalking may seem less significant, and the dangers represented by stalking may be overlooked.

\* Stalkers often cross state or tribal lines to monitor, harass, or commit violence against victims. Authorities face significant challenges investigating and prosecuting crimes committed in more than one jurisdiction.

\* Stalkers are not easily deterred. Stalkers can be determined and unrelenting. Conventional sanctions such as protection orders do not necessarily deter them, and many stalkers continue pursuing their victims even after they have been arrested and imprisoned.

\* Ensuring victim safety is difficult. There is always a risk that stalking may escalate to physical, even lethal violence, and criminal justice interventions may be ineffective. All interventions must be carefully monitored and coordinated with action to protect victims.

### Community Policing Approach

The complex challenges associated with the response to stalking suggest why this crime requires a more comprehensive approach than that of traditional or "reactive" policing. Stalking calls for prevention, early intervention, and strategic problem solving -- all features of community policing. Community policing aims to reduce and prevent crime through increased interaction and cooperation between local police and the people and the neighborhoods they serve. The central challenge for police departments and community partners is to translate these principles into practical strategies, policies, and protocols that can achieve these goals.

### Model Stalking Protocol

In 2002, the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services published *Creating an Effective Stalking Protocol*, a monograph created by the National Center.[2] The publication presents the rationale for applying the principles of community policing to stalking, the National Center's Model Stalking Protocol, and a pilot test plan. The Model Stalking Protocol summarizes definitions of stalking and other legal considerations, the basic elements of a law enforcement stalking response protocol, the elements of a stalking case and stalking behaviors, and the aspects of stalking cases that necessitate law enforcement involvement with victims and advocates to protect victims and hold offenders accountable. The document also describes the roles of police communications personnel, graduated response strategies, and key elements in investigations of stalking cases.[3]

### The Philadelphia Response

In the late 1990s, the Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Police Department (PPD) -- the fourth-largest police department in the United States -- established teams of domestic violence detectives in response to an alarming number of assaults and homicides related to domestic violence. Teams reviewed reports submitted by patrol officers, interviewed the domestic violence victims again, and decided whether the evidence justified an application for an arrest warrant. The domestic violence detectives worked and received monthly training with victim assistance officers (police officers with specialized training in victim assistance), who kept track of developments in cases and gave victims information about orders of protection, victim compensation, and local support services. The work of these teams, still a key component of the PPD's response to victims today, increased the department's interest in having officers recognize stalking in whatever context the crime might arise.

Several years after the PPD had established these domestic violence teams, a survey of officers had found that police officer knowledge of "stalking, its legal definition, and the appropriate police response was limited." Some officers reported never having received information or training on stalking, and many appeared not to view stalking as a problem.[4] For this reason, among others, the PPD agreed to pilot test the National Center's Model Stalking Protocol.

The PPD decided to run the pilot program in its Northeast Division, which comprises four separate police districts, and assigned all stalking cases to the division's officers. The department first built the internal coordination (among the detectives, training academy, headquarters, district command, and victim assistance officers) to implement the stalking protocol. Then, to provide for a coordinated community response to stalking victims, the PPD invited several community victim service organizations to serve as partners in its planning and implementation process.[5] The District Attorney's Office also joined the

project -- attending meetings, contributing to training, and laying the groundwork for more extensive participation during the citywide implementation of the project.

### Pilot Project Implementation

To train officers to implement the protocol, the PPD's Research and Planning Unit -- led by (then) Inspector Patricia Georgio Fox -- developed a set of training courses. The first, a day-long session, trained roughly 75 domestic violence detectives and victim assistance officers; representatives of local victim assistance organizations and the District Attorney's Office also attended. The second was a series of one-hour sessions to improve the recognition of and response to stalking among all officers in the Northeast Division.

The curriculum for both trainings, developed by the police academy faculty and the National Center, included stalking guidelines based on an earlier PPD policy directive on domestic violence, adapted to follow the National Center's Model Stalking Protocol. The PPD scheduled the training during "fat" days, when all patrol officers are on duty at the same time, to ensure adequate coverage of the division's regular work. In addition to the victim assistance officers and Northeast Division domestic violence detectives, all PPD training officers were invited to attend the training, signaling the commissioner's plan to implement the protocol throughout the entire department. The protocol went "live" on the day after the second training session.

The project partners played a key role in the training process. A member of the district attorney's staff shared her office's priorities in prosecuting stalking cases, stressing the importance of documenting the demeanor of both victims and offenders, relevant information about the parties, statements by investigating officers, full incident details, actual words spoken by victims, any information providing a context for cases, and officers' recommendations about the appropriate level of bail in high-risk cases. The victim advocacy agencies described the full range of services for victims of domestic violence and stalking.

Within a year of launching the pilot project, the department conducted formal and informal research to determine the impact of the training. The number of stalking investigations in the Northeast Division had increased significantly, suggesting some heightened understanding of the crime among police officers, and victim assistance organizations reported a greater ability to advise victims about the crime. The District Attorney's Office reported improvements in the probable-cause affidavits and arrest warrants prepared after the training, and the number of stalking-related charges increased. Although some findings were ambiguous and some officers expressed reservations about the project's potential, the research revealed areas where more training was needed and laid the groundwork for the citywide implementation phase.[6]

### Taking the Protocol Citywide

After the demonstration project in the Northeast Division, the next step was to implement a workable stalking policy for the entire PPD. In the summer of 2002, with strong support from Commissioner Sylvester Johnson and Patricia Georgio Fox, now deputy commissioner for crime control strategies, the project moved into the next stage. From 2002 to 2004, the PPD held more than 40 meetings with all stakeholders (including local victim service organizations, the National Center, and the District Attorney's Office) to identify and rectify problems that might impede department-wide implementation. The sessions produced plans to develop a department directive (a set of guidelines) and a "train-the-trainer" curriculum on stalking.

Directive 42: Directive 42, the PPD stalking directive implemented May 1, 2004, includes six sections: policy, definitions, police officers, district operations room supervisors, victim assistance officers, and domestic violence team detectives. The PPD's policy on stalking (Section I) is to accurately report and aggressively investigate all reports of stalking, increase officers' awareness of the crime, ensure proper action when a crime is determined to be stalking, arrest perpetrators of the crime, and inform victims about safety measures and how to seek a petition for protection from abuse (PFA). Section II provides the legal definition of stalking under the Pennsylvania Criminal Statutes (§ 2709.1), statutes on related crimes, and information on the grading of offenses. Section III details procedures and issues for police officers to note in investigating and reporting stalking cases. Sections IV to VI describe the roles of district operations room supervisors, victim assistance officers, and domestic violence team detectives in processing cases and working with victims. Directive 42 appendixes include a chart describing stalking

investigation procedures and a list of referral numbers of service agencies for victims.

Training: Given the complexity of stalking and of the new directive, training became a crucial component of the implementation process. With funding from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, the PPD conducted train-the-trainer sessions with a curriculum devised by the National Center and adapted by the PPD. From 2006 to 2007, six National Center-trained trainers in turn trained 700 first-line supervisors of officers most likely to respond to 9-1-1 calls for domestic violence, sexual assault, or stalking. These supervisors then trained their staffs.

Training covered three interrelated categories of crimes -- stalking, domestic violence, and sexual assault -- focusing on the scope, nature, and dynamics of the crimes; national, state, and local prevalence statistics; potential lethality; generic and legal definitions; levels of reporting; reasons for hesitation to report; and the interrelationships among these crime categories. It included research on common traits of domestic violence offenders and on stalkers, who are much more difficult to profile. The training also covered the excuses and arguments often used by perpetrators in trying to justify their behavior.

The curriculum described in detail the department directives and the required response for each crime: patrol procedures and officer responsibilities; arrest powers and investigative processes; how to interview victims, suspects, and witnesses; and how to ensure that victims have needed information on safety planning and available victim services. Training included PowerPoint presentations on the three categories of crimes and a presentation (in some sessions) by a Philadelphia victim of stalking and domestic violence who described her own terrifying experience at the hands of an abuser.

### Impact of the Stalking Initiative

Although the PPD has not yet conducted formal research on the department-wide implementation process, department leaders report seeing positive effects from the training. "It was an exceptional training with a great impact," said Inspector Jeanette Dooley, the first and former commanding officer of the Victim Services Unit, in a September 2008 interview. "As a result, accurate information that officers need has been getting out there, which ultimately helps better serve domestic violence and stalking victims."

One immediate result of the training was the elimination of many common misconceptions among officers about the stalking statute, the reporting process, serving PFAs, and prosecuting felony-level stalking cases. For example, many officers who were confused about when PFAs go into effect learned that the orders are effective as soon as they are issued and entered into the computer. The training also made clear that officers cannot stop trying to serve PFAs after three attempts to locate the respondent, as some had believed, and that, in addition, if the respondent is not at the address at which service is being attempted, the officer can serve the PFA papers by giving them to any adult at the respondent's residence or a person in charge at the respondent's place of employment.

The training also corrected misconceptions about the grading of stalking offenses and prosecutors' willingness to pursue felony charges in stalking cases. Under Pennsylvania law, a first stalking offense is a misdemeanor, but a second or subsequent offense (arrest or conviction) is a felony. Prosecutors who spoke at the training said they would definitely charge felony stalking if police brought them well-documented reports. After the training, which covered in detail how to complete and document reports, PPD supervisors noticed dramatic improvements in the completeness and accuracy of police reports on stalking cases, and more stalking cases (including felony stalking cases) are now being charged.

Another crucial outcome is that all divisions of the PPD, the District Attorney's Office, and victim advocates are now delivering the same accurate, up-to-date information about the crime, the law, and department policies to colleagues and victims alike. Such consistency benefits criminal justice agencies, victim advocates, and victims.

Yet another benefit is that the project has built understanding among police officers, victims, and victim service providers. The training emphasized the plight of victims, powerfully reinforced by the Philadelphia stalking victim's personal story, and the importance of interdepartmental coordination in responding to cases such as hers. Because this victim lived, worked, and visited relatives in three different PPD districts while she was being stalked, her case showed the value of internal coordination and collaborating with

victim service agencies to protect victims. The victim advocates, on the other hand, came to understand some of the complex challenges confronting police officers as they investigate domestic violence and stalking cases, including the split-second decisions officers are often forced to make.

An unexpected offshoot of the training is improved communication between the PPD and the judiciary system. In response to an officer's comment during testimony about some information he had learned during the domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking training, the judge called the PPD to find out more about the curriculum. The conversation led the department to be invited to attend a study group held by a judge who hears domestic violence cases and approves protection orders. The purpose of the group is to review cases and identify problems that slow the adjudication process. At these meetings, police have proposed steps judges can take to help victims, such as ordering that all firearms in a home be seized if one firearm has been used to threaten a victim.

## Products

In addition to Directive 42 and the training that was provided, the project resulted in several products -- such as training handouts on the Pennsylvania stalking statute, the crime of stalking, and PPD procedures for investigating stalking cases -- that help both police officers and victims. The department also developed tip cards that officers carry with them when responding to stalking cases and serving PFAs. One tip card for officers lists questions to ask stalking victims and recommended safety measures for victims to take. It includes questions on offenders' previous conduct and the level of fear felt by victims, as well as tips on obtaining protection orders, making safety plans, and documenting stalking incidents. The other card, for officers to give to victims of domestic violence, describes in English and Spanish the rights of domestic violence victims and services available for them.

## Related PPD Initiatives

Under the grant that funded the training, Philadelphia and the PPD have also launched several other initiatives that help both the department and victims of stalking, according to project manager Charlette Harrison. Philadelphia has established a citywide 24-hour hotline in English and Spanish -- staffed seven days a week by partner agencies -- for victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking and has printed more than 20,000 resource cards listing victim services. The PPD has also partnered with the probation department to create a "targeted patrol program" of unscheduled visits to individuals on probation for domestic violence-related offenses. Police go out either individually or teamed with a probation officer to ensure that offenders are complying with the terms of their probation. For probationers who have also been served with an order of protection, Harrison says, the patrols add "teeth" to the protection orders and offer added protection to victims.

## Lessons Learned

Although the collaboration between the PPD and the National Center on response to stalking has not yet been formally evaluated, it has already yielded some useful lessons and promising paths for other police departments to explore. Probably the most important lesson, says Inspector Jeanette Dooley, is that "the program can help prevent more serious crimes that begin with domestic violence and stalking ... up to and including homicide." When officers recognize the crime and arrest stalkers, both victims and responding officers are safer.

Another key lesson is the importance of leadership. Getting a 7,000-member department to buy into a program presents daunting challenges, and not all officers viewed the program as important or the stalking directive as useful.<sup>[7]</sup> Yet the consistent, visible support of PPD leaders ensured the program's viability. Police commissioners Richard Neal and Sylvester Johnson paved the way for several phases of the project, and Commissioner Johnson regularly appeared at meetings and training sessions to voice support. Deputy Commissioner Fox also played a pivotal role in launching the program, engaging the department and its partners, negotiating the complex course that produced Directive 42 and the training program, and keeping the program on course. Inspector Dooley launched the original monthly training for domestic violence detectives and victim assistance officers, led the team that wrote Directive 42, and provided consistent guidance throughout the implementation process. Current police commissioner Charles Ramsey has emphatically supported the grant, the training program, the Victim Services Unit, and the PPD's work with victim advocates.

The importance of training proved to be another crucial lesson. Although the development of Directive 42 represented a significant achievement, department-wide training was necessary to clarify and implement this new set of guidelines on stalking.

Involving key stakeholders in the community and the criminal justice system also helped promote the project's success. The collaboration among all these agencies helped meet the project's goals -- to help close gaps in services, build trust, and create a suitably comprehensive response to stalking.

## Conclusion

The crime of stalking requires sophisticated, comprehensive responses from communities and their criminal justice systems. The collaboration among the PPD, the National Center, and community partners in Philadelphia has created a road map and laid groundwork that other departments can use to build antistalking strategies that work. By applying the lessons learned in Philadelphia, police departments can better combat a challenging, dangerous crime.

The Stalking Resource Center of the National Center for Victims of Crime offers training and resources for professionals in law enforcement, prosecution, victim services, and related fields. For more information, contact the Stalking Resource Center at 202-467-8700 or visit <http://www.ncvc.org/src/>.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the Philadelphia Police Department's many generous contributions to this article.

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## January Is National Stalking Awareness Month

January 2009 marks the sixth annual U.S. National Stalking Awareness Month, which aims to raise awareness about a crime that affects 1.4 million victims every year. This year's theme, "Stalking: Know It. Name It. Stop It," challenges the United States to combat this dangerous crime by learning more about it.

Law enforcement officers can benefit from ongoing education about stalking laws, the many forms of stalking, and the links between stalking and other crimes, such as intimate-partner violence, sexual assault, and intimate-partner homicide. The crime takes many forms, from unwanted calls, cards, gifts, or visits to assaults, threats, vandalism, or even animal abuse. Stalkers use a range of devices -- such as computers, Global Positioning System technology, and hidden cameras -- to track and intimidate their victims.

More information about National Stalking Awareness Month is available at <http://stalkingawarenessmonth.org>. Training and technical assistance are available from the National Center for Victims of Crime's Stalking Resource Center, available at 202-4678700 or online at <http://www.ncvc.org/src/>.

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## National Center for Victims of Crime Releases Report on Ethical Considerations for Community Policing in the Digital Age

At the meeting of major cities chiefs at the 2008 annual IACP conference in November, the National Center for Victims of Crime released the report *Beyond the Beat: Ethical Considerations for Community Policing in the Digital Age*. *Beyond the Beat* aims to help police departments and community organizations avoid ethical and practical pitfalls as they adopt emerging technologies to enhance public safety and reduce crime.

*Beyond the Beat* is based on interviews with experts in the field: research on how law enforcement agencies are now using information and communications technology (ICT) in community policing; and the deliberations of a panel of experts in criminal justice, civil rights, technology, and community organizing.

Report topics include the following:

- \* Evolution of community policing and ICT
- \* How technology strengthens police-community partnerships
- \* Handling personally identifying information
- \* Ethical implications of ICT use
- \* Guiding principles for police-community ICT projects

The full report is available at <http://www.ncvc.org/ict/>.

Notes:

1. National Center for Victims of Crime, *The Model Stalking Code Revisited: Responding to the New Realities of Stalking*, January 2007, <http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/AGP.Net/Components/documentViewer/Download.aspxnz?DocumentID=41822> (accessed November 17, 2008), 24.
2. National Center for Victims of Crime, *Creating an Effective Stalking Protocol*, April 2002, <http://www.ncvc.org/src/AGP.Net/Components/DocumentViewer/Download.aspxnz?DocumentID=37604> (accessed November 17, 2008).
3. National Center for Victims of Crime, *Implementing a New Approach to Stalking: A Case Study* (Washington, D.C.: National Center for Victims of Crime, 2005), 10.
4. National Center for Victims of Crime, *Creating an Effective Stalking Protocol*, 78.
5. Partners included direct service organizations -- Women Against Abuse, the Lutheran Settlement House, Women in Transition, Congreso de Latinos Unidos, and Women Organized Against Rape -- as well as the Women's Law Project, a policy-focused organization that served as coordinator and spokesperson for the other agencies.
6. National Center for Victims of Crime, *Creating an Effective Stalking Protocol*, 87, 94.
7. National Center for Victims of Crime, *Implementing a New Approach to Stalking: A Case Study*, 27.

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