

## **Madera County Grand Jury Report 1415-04**

### **Chowchilla Police Department**

Pursuant to section 919(a) and 919(b) of the California Penal Code, the Madera County Grand Jury visited the Chowchilla Police Department. The Grand Jury found the police department staff professional, approachable and informative.

The Chowchilla Police Department is a “full service” agency, responding to all calls, despite the loss of officers since the recession. The community, not the city, funds the effective K-9 Unit through fundraisers.

Vehicle cameras are viewed as positive for the officers and citizens. Nearly all of the patrol vehicles are equipped with cameras. The department is also testing body cameras.

The Grand Jury recommends that the department add two patrol officers within the next fiscal year, pursue K-9 grant funding, equip all vehicles with cameras and finalize the testing of officer body cameras.

The Chowchilla Police Department is commended on its relationship with the community it serves.

Full report is available on the Madera County Grand Jury website:  
[info@maderagrandjury.org](mailto:info@maderagrandjury.org)



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**Introduction:**

On January 28, 2015, pursuant to section 919(a) and 919(b) of the California Penal Code, the Madera County Grand Jury visited the Chowchilla Police Department (CPD) at 122 Trinity Avenue, Chowchilla, CA. The Grand Jury found the CPD staff professional, approachable and informative.

**Facts:**

1. At the time of the visit, the Chief of Police was serving on an interim basis and operating under a budget prepared by prior Chief of Police.
2. CPD is a “full service” department that responds to all calls.
3. CPD had 17 active sworn officers and three reserve officers on the date of our visit.
4. There were 22 sworn officers and nine non-sworn staff prior to the recession.
5. Two officers and a sergeant are on patrol each shift. The day shift has two additional officers assigned to the elementary school and the high school.
6. There are seven administrative (non-sworn) employees.
7. The canine (K-9) unit has one dog, an officer handler and two K-9 vehicles. The K-9 unit is not funded by the city.
8. CPD responds to 90 to 100 calls per day.
9. There are 5 to 10 arrests per day.
10. Arrestees are housed in the holding facility until a deputy is available for transport to the Madera County Jail.
11. CPD has a state-specific policy manual through Lexipol, a national company of legal and public safety professionals.
12. Cameras were installed five years ago on the majority of CPD’s vehicles.
13. Camera footage is saved for one year. If the footage is used as case evidence it is saved for six years.
14. CPD is testing body cameras.

**Findings:**

The Grand Jury found that:

1. Sworn staff, which has increased by only one since the recession, is inadequate.
2. There are times when sick and administrative leave reduces the number of officers on patrol.
3. K-9 handler teams increase officer safety and provide a proactive response to narcotic crimes.

4. CPD organizes fundraisers for its K-9 unit.
5. CPD is recruiting a K-9 handler in anticipation of acquiring a second trained narcotics and apprehension dog.
6. The purchase of the dog is dependent on the money raised by a fundraiser in March 2015.
7. CPD has not pursued K-9 grant funds.
8. Training of the handlers and dogs is continuous.
9. The Lexipol policy manual is customized for CPD by the law firm of Ferguson, Praet & Sherman of Santa Ana, CA and by the CPD command staff.
10. Lexipol provides regular updates in response to legislative mandates, case law and changes in best practices.
11. CPD is regularly notified of policy changes and immediately updates their manual.
12. All staff members are held accountable for being familiar with the manual and policy changes. Officers also receive daily training bulletins.
13. Officers have discretion in whether or not to cite or arrest an individual, except in driving under the influence (DUI) matters.
14. All officers are expected to enforce impaired driving laws with due diligence.
15. Drivers suspected of DUI are administered field sobriety tests.
16. Senior officers handle sensitive investigations, calling upon California Highway Patrol, Madera County Sheriff's Office and the Madera Police Department in conflict of interest situations. The mutual aid is reciprocal.
17. CPD command staff sees vehicle cameras as positive for the officers and the community.

### **Recommendations:**

*The Madera County Grand Jury recommends that the Chowchilla Police Department:*

1. Request funding to increase patrol officers by two within the next fiscal year.
2. Pursue K-9 grant funding.
3. Equip all police vehicles with cameras.
4. Finalize testing and implementation of officer body cameras.
5. Be commended on CPD's relationship with the community.

### **Respondents:**

Chowchilla Police Department Chief  
122 Trinity Avenue  
Chowchilla, CA 93610

Chowchilla City Council  
Civic Center Plaza  
130 South Second Street  
Chowchilla, CA 93610

Chowchilla City Manager  
Civic Center Plaza  
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