

APD sure racial profiling is avoided

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The Amarillo Police Department is confident it's doing the job the public wants.

APD released its 2007 racial profiling data Tuesday and said it shows the police are enforcing laws and conducting searches without regard to race.

"We feel very confident and comfortable we are responding to concerns and complaints from the public," said APD Cpl. Jerry Neufeld. "During 2007, we had zero complaints from the public of racial profiling - that speaks volumes."

The numbers show Amarillo police have stopped 32,859 people in 2007, arrested 1,348 and ticketed 22,743. According to the report, whites were more likely to receive a written warning compared to other groups.

About 73.4 percent of all Hispanics stopped received tickets, a higher percentage than any other race. Blacks who were stopped were more likely to be arrested than any other race.

The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, a watchdog group that collects racial profiling data from across the state, particularly looks at consent searches to determine whether racial profiling is taking place.

Early last month, as Potter and Randall counties were releasing their profiling data, coalition policy analyst Molly Totman said that blacks and Latinos are being asked for consent searches more often than white drivers across the state.

Totman said consent searches are looked at because that is a time when the officer has no legal cause to conduct a search but can clearly identify a driver's race, which could be indicative of racial profiling.

Before a consent search can be done in Amarillo, drivers must sign a form explaining that they have the right to refuse a consent search without facing a penalty.

Neufeld said that using the form removes any suspicion of forced coercion.

APD activity, such as increased patrol of narcotic locations or gang areas, can often influence statistics. Neufeld acknowledged that those areas can often be in parts of the city with large minority populations, which leads to a higher number of minorities being stopped.

According to APD data, blacks more often agreed to consent searches than whites or Hispanics.

According to a letter sent from Police Chief Robert Taylor to City Manager Alan Taylor, the city does not have to produce the report because every APD patrol vehicle is equipped with cameras.

Police Chief Robert Taylor's letter went on to say he provided the data to the City Commission to ensure "as much as possible racial profiling does not occur."

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