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Police want to curb mishaps

Traffic patrols increase in C.S.

BY DAVID TEWES

Many good things can be said about the growth of a city, but not about the associated increase in traffic and its problems.

One of the biggest problems is the number of deaths and injuries related to traffic mishaps. There have been four deaths in College Station this year caused by traffic accidents, but the College Station police began a program recently to curb the number of deaths and injuries.

The program, which is a modification of the selective traffic enforcement program (STEP) used here before, allows police to expand their traffic patrols. Before October, they could patrol only high accident areas.

High accident areas are the four streets surrounding the Texas A&M campus plus Dominik Drive, Southwest Parkway, Holleman Drive and Anderson Street.

But after receiving complaints and noticing moving traffic violations in residential areas, police officials decided to try to control traffic in these areas also.

"I don't know how much success we'll have in preventing accidents," said Sgt. Mason Newton of the College Station Police Department. "All we can do is try."

Six of the 32 uniformed police are assigned specifically to catch traffic violators. Two work the morning shift, two in the evening and one at night. Newton works when needed. The other officers who answer complaint calls can also help with traffic when necessary.

There are 302 streets in College Station and deciding which ones to patrol isn't easy. Newton said police are guided by the time and location of complaints as well as by their own experience. In other words, the area police patrol shifts with the day of the week and the time of day.

Newton said most accidents occur on Friday from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 to 6 p.m. But the worst accidents are on Friday and Saturday nights, he added. Newton said every officer on duty during peak hours is on the street watching for violators.

To prevent wrecks, the police must know what causes them. Three of the officers here specialize in investigating wrecks and Newton said he hopes to have all the officers receive special training.

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— Sgt. Mason Newton,
College Station
Police Department

"Looking around seems to be the major cause of wrecks," Newton said. "There is a lot to look at around here and apparently (drivers) are doing it."

"We are after moving violations which are dangerous to everybody. We are looking for DWIs, speeding, improper turns and improper lane changes. Hopefully we can get a few of these DWIs off the road before they kill themselves or somebody else."

The department has two radar units to help control speeding. They are used almost constantly on the morning and evening shifts. Radar isn't used at night because there is only one officer working traffic. His main job is watching for drunken drivers.

But just patrolling and setting up radar units doesn't prevent moving violations. Drivers must be made aware of the police presence.

Police try to give the violator the

idea that he could be caught any place, anytime. And when he is caught, the violator is usually given a ticket which results in a fine. Violators are more likely to remember a fine than a warning ticket.

"We don't stay in any one area too long unless there is an excessive number of violations there," Newton said. "I would say at least three-fourths of the traffic violators that we stop are (Texas A&M) students."

Whether the new STEP program works remains to be seen. The original STEP program began earlier this year, was successful in catching more violators. This can be seen in the number of tickets issued.

In the first eight months of 1977, police issued 5,213 traffic tickets and 340 accident tickets. In the first eight months of 1976, police issued 4,611 traffic tickets and 438 accident tickets.

These figures show there has been a shift in the number of tickets given from accident tickets to traffic tickets. Although there is no accurate way to prove it, it appears that police attempts to prevent moving violations before they cause wrecks has worked.

These figures are the result of the original STEP program. If this is any indication of how the modified program will work, fewer deaths and injuries might be expected.

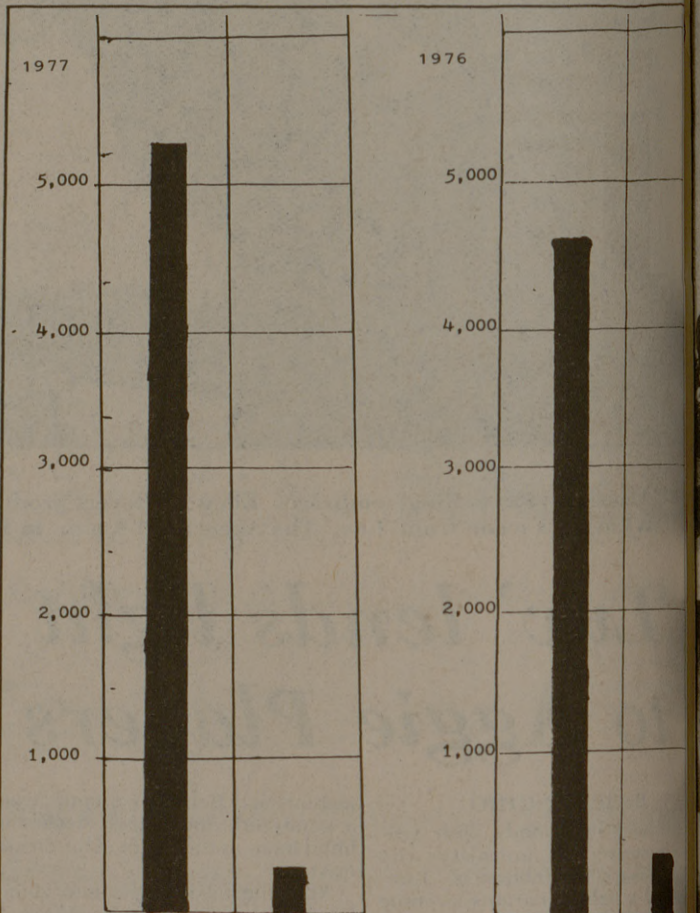
There are three major factors which could determine the future effectiveness of the new police effort: the growth of Texas A&M, fuel costs and the economy.

Since most traffic violators are Texas A&M students, the program's effectiveness could depend on how much the University grows.

A student population study was done by Jim Ericson, a graduate student enrolled in a development feasibility and design laboratory in the department of urban and regional planning at Texas A&M.

His study indicates the number of students enrolled at Texas A&M will increase until 1980 and then gradually decline. There are about 28,833 students now enrolled and the study predicts an increase to about 30,632 students by 1980.

Ericson declined to estimate the study's accuracy, but he said it is "reasonably accurate" provided no major changes occur in Bryan-College Station.



There were 5,213 traffic tickets and 340 accident tickets issued in the first eight months of 1977. In 1976, in the same time period, 4,611 traffic tickets and 438 accident tickets were written.

This means there probably won't be a significant increase in traffic here which would cause more problems for the police.

But if there is an increase in traffic, motorists may soon find it hard to pay for gasoline because the Or-

ganization of Petroleum Exporting Countries will probably raise the price of crude oil by next year.

A third factor is the economy. Money must be available to buy gasoline and cars before they can be a problem for the police here.

Atheist violates decency alleged theft contested

AUSTIN — Atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair and her son broke out in a shouting match at a news conference Wednesday over an alleged theft by an employee.

O'Hair said her son has sided with

people trying to cripple her American Atheist Center.

William Murray responded by accusing his mother of violating decency standards and wrongly claiming a former employee with computer equipment.

Murray called the news conference to defend the former employee whom O'Hair accused of stealing two computer tapes from the center.

"Madalyn O'Hair has made a broad range of accusations against a number of individuals in the few days," Murray said. "Some of those individuals believe O'Hair is using these accusations to cover managerial problems of her non-profit corporation."

O'Hair, 58, said she had filed complaints against Susan Stroebel, her husband with the city attorney's office.

But Murray's lawyer, former Austin Mayor Jeffrey Friedman, said an arrest warrant had been issued against the Stroebels.

At that point O'Hair retorted, "You are a liar."

Austin police said O'Hair reported computer equipment stolen from her office and said an investigation was being conducted but charges had been filed.

"There are boundaries of decency that I think all of us must observe," Murray said of Mrs. Stroebel. "She is a decent human being who is married and has three children."

O'Hair and Murray declined to discuss the differences that led to his quitting his job at the center last month.

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