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'There's no way to tell based on the study if we do racial profiling.'

— POLICE CAPT. ELVIA WILLIAMS

to higher crime rates.

Critics of racial profiling studies elsewhere have said that they reflect not racism, but admirable efforts to reduce crime in minority neighborhoods by concentrating enforcement. However, Eugene's black population isn't particularly concentrated downtown and it appears unlikely that increased downtown patrols could fully account for the large discrepancies in stop rates for blacks.

Williams admits to some resistance to the traffic stop data collection project among line officers. "I'm not going to say everyone is supportive of the project."

But she says the department launched the study in response to concerns in the black and Latino communities that "they are being targeted." She says even without the data, such concerns are a problem for the department. "It is a problem if people perceive it to be a problem."

Williams says "we are examining" whether minorities are more likely to be traffic and criminal offenders in Eugene, but national studies have shown that "minorities are no more likely than whites" to carry drugs or weapons in cars.

The department has ongoing diversity training and minority recruitment programs and is now looking for about a dozen new officers, according to Williams.

BIG PROBLEM

Eugene isn't alone in dealing with the issue of racial profiling. Scores of cities and states across the nation have begun collecting data in response to minority complaints.

The EPD pulled together traffic stop data from 21 cities for comparison. The disparity between Eugene's stop rate for blacks is significantly above average. Eugene had a stop rate for blacks about 2.3 times higher than whites. The other cities averaged a stop rate 2.0 times higher. The disparity in Eugene's search rate for Latino drivers was also much higher. Eugene searched Latino drivers at a rate 2.6 times higher than whites. The other cities averaged a rate only 2.0 times higher.

The EPD also isn't alone in initially failing to admit a racial profiling problem. In New Jersey, the state police denied and covered up that they were involved in racial profiling for a decade despite mounting evidence. Finally, the shooting of three minorities in a van in 1998 caused the profiling issue to explode into national headlines and state police leaders to confess that profiling was a widespread problem in their depart-

ment. But the powerful New Jersey police trooper union has continued to fight efforts to reform the department and has alleged minorities are more likely to be criminals.

In Portland, Police Chief Mark Kroeker denied two years ago that a study showing that police stopped blacks at a rate 2.6 times higher than whites was evidence of racial profiling. But *The Oregonian* wrote in an editorial, "The numbers that show the existence of DWB [Driving While Black] must now be used to stop it."

Kroeker was forced to resign this year in the wake of a scandal involving the police fatally shooting a black woman during a traffic stop.

Distrust of police on racial profiling is widespread. A 2001 state poll found 39 percent of Oregonians think police unfairly use race to stop people. A 1999 national Gallup poll found 60 percent think police racial profiling is widespread.

The issue of racial profiling has gained more attention recently after U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft launched an effort to question 5,000 Middle Eastern men on terrorism. Police chiefs in Eugene, Portland and Corvallis expressed concerns with singling people out based on race.

Eugene could learn from other departments in trying to solve its profiling problem. In New Jersey a police expert suggested using undercover stings to catch profiling officers. The California Highway Patrol recently agreed to audit officer stop records to identify profiling officers and ban consent searches as part of a settlement with the American Civil Liberties Union.

Eugene police decided to not identify individual officers in its stop data. In New Jersey, individual officers confessed to forging stop data to hide evidence of profiling. Eugene police failed to report racial data for 21 percent of all traffic citations in 2002. It's unclear if Eugene police were trying to hide something or just too busy to fill out the forms.

Hernandez, Dalton and Coleman say solving the EPD's profiling problem won't be easy.

"I don't think there's much that we can do, to be honest," Hernandez says. "The mentality has already been set. It's going to be very unrealistic to change the mentality of every police officer."

Hernandez says the city should reach out and encourage fearful minorities to help identify profiling cops who could then be retrained or fired. "It can be controlled more by educating the community members by telling them their rights and getting them to file complaints." **ew**

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