Arizona Department of Public Safety—Followup on Specific Recommendations from Previous Audits and Sunset Factors

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS
PERFORMANCE AUDIT

Most prior audit recommendations implemented

Our Conclusion

The Department of Public Safety (Department) should implement its goal to clear traffic accidents quickly, and consistent with the Auditor General's performance audit recommendations made in 2000 and 2001, it should assess the need for its current level of aviation resources, improve case management information, and document decisions on whether to participate in investigations and on task forces.

The Department was established as a state law enforcement agency in 1969. It patrols state highways, investigates highway accidents, and enforces state laws. The Department administers the State's sex offender registration and community notification compliance programs, and regulates private investigators and security guards. Its Crime Lab conducts deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) and other forensic evidence testing. The Department performs its functions through its divisions—Highway Patrol, Technical Services, and Criminal Investigations—and the Director's Office.

Highway Patrol—The Department reported that because of budget reductions and a self-imposed hiring freeze implemented to promote fiscal responsibility, it has not hired Highway Patrol officers since October 2008. Although the Highway Patrol had a shortage of 60 officers as of October 2010, it was working to minimize the public safety impact by patrolling primarily the highway segments with the highest traffic volumes and most calls for service. It has been aided in this effort by a decline in fatal traffic accidents from 319 in fiscal year 2008 to 237 in fiscal year 2010.

The Department also intends to adopt a goal in 2011 to clear traffic incidents within 90 minutes. This follows the time frame established by California, Florida, and Washington.

Aviation Resources—The Department implemented all of the Auditor General's June 2000 performance audit recommendations (Report No. 00-7),

except the recommendation to formally assess whether it could dispose of fixed-wing aircraft because it believed that all of its aircraft were needed to fulfill its mission. The Department flies five helicopters and four fixed-wing aircraft for various missions in the State. However, because of budget reductions that have prevented the Department from hiring pilots to fly its aircraft, the number of missions has declined by more than half for helicopters and by almost a quarter for fixed-wing aircraft.

Helicopter and Fixed-Wing Air Transport Missions
Fiscal Years 2008 through 2010
(Unaudited)

Helicopter Missions	2008	2009	2010
Law Enforcement	915	438	343
Maintenance & Logistics	382	316	259
Medical	231	146	98
Search & Rescue	489	332	310
Training	293	250	174
Other	194	50	32
Total	2,504	1,532	1,216

Air Transport Missions	2008	2009	2010
Law Enforcement	157	123	91
Governor	38	40	55
Maintenance	24	26	19
Meetings[1]	88	23	30
Search and Rescue	0	0	10
Training	63	43	91
Other	17	8	6
Total	387	263	302

[1] Meeting missions include flights taken by the Secretary of State and staff from the Department's Director's Office.

2011

Although aviation functions are common for large law enforcement agencies, because aircraft are expensive to own, operate, and maintain, the Department should assess the need for its current level of aviation resources.

Criminal investigations—To maintain its effectiveness in response to budget reductions and to help ensure that the Department's law enforcement goals and priorities are met, the Department should implement the recommendations from the Auditor General's September 2001 performance audit (Report No. 01-22).

Specifically, the Department should:

- Adopt a formal process to decide whether to participate on multi-agency task forces.
- Develop specific criteria for guiding whether to accept investigative requests from local, county, and state agencies.
- Improve criminal case management information in order to determine outcomes and effectiveness, and to ensure that priorities are met.

Crime Lab—The Crime Lab performs forensic testing of DNA, firearms, and traces of fibers, hair, glass, paint, and soil. The Crime Lab also compares latent prints to known fingerprints, palm prints, and footprints. The Department implemented all of the recommendations from the Auditor General's September 2000 performance audit (Report No. 00-12). However, because of reduced staff, increased demand for forensic testing, and outdated equipment, the Crime Lab is behind in its work. To help address the backlog, the Crime Lab prioritized the analyses needed. It first addresses the most serious violent crime cases, then ensures that it is meeting court discovery deadlines, followed by cases involving felonies, and finally cases involving misdemeanors.

Telecommunications—Consistent with the recommendations in the Auditor General's March 2001 performance audit (Report No. 01-05), the Department has been upgrading its telecommunications system from an analog to a digital system. However, because of budget

Crime Lab Backlogged Cases[1]
October 2008, 2009, and 2010
(Unaudited)

Analysis Type	2008	2009	2010
DNA/Serology	2,016	2,326	2,694
Drug	200	180	241
Latent Prints	423	1,213	854
Other[2]	419	236	183
Toxicology:			
Alcohol	0	0	74
Drug	692	935	1,474
Total	3,750	4,890	5,520
DNA Database[3]	59,567	25,913	39,518

[1] Backlog is defined as an analysis request not completed within 30 days or more from the date the request was received.

[2] Other includes firearms; trace evidence such as fibers, hairs, and soil; and questioned documents.

[3] Represents DNA samples collected from convicted offenders and arrestees. The samples are analyzed and the DNA profiles are entered into the DNA database and matched against DNA evidence from unsolved cases.

reductions, it will take several years longer than originally anticipated to complete the project.

Recommendations:

The Department should:

- Implement its 90-minute highway incident clearance goal.
- Assess the need for its current level of aviation resources.
- Implement the criminal investigations recommendations regarding task forces, investigative requests, and case management information.