

Florida STG Intelligence Unit Aims to Keep Communities Safe

By Michelle Jordan

Created in 1992, the Florida Department of Corrections Security Threat Intelligence Unit has become a primary source of intelligence for many federal, state and local law enforcement agencies. The unit's mission is to maintain safe and secure operations for staff, visitors and inmates by identifying, certifying and monitoring security threat group (STG) activity; coordinating all intelligence with fellow criminal justice agencies; and providing community awareness programs and education.

The DOC defines an STG as a formal or informal ongoing inmate group, gang, organization or association comprising three or more members who:

- Have a common name or common identifying signs, colors or symbols;
- Individually or collectively engage in or have engaged in a pattern of gang activity, criminal activity or departmental rule violations; or
- Potentially pose a threat to the public, staff, visitors, inmates or the secure and orderly operation of a facility or probation office.

The Extent of the Problem

Since the Security Threat Intelligence Unit was formed, gang membership has grown inside prisons as well as in communities. In a 10-year period, the number of gang members incarcerated in Florida prisons increased from 1,793 in September 1998 to 5,609 in September 2008. Table 1 shows the increases in membership of the DOC's top-10 gangs from 2006 through 2008.

In a study conducted by the DOC Bureau of Data and Research, every county in Florida has at least one gang member incarcerated in state prison. Table 2 lists the 10 counties with the highest conviction rate of gang members in the past three years.

Gang-related criminal activities in Florida also have increased every year since 1990. The crimes committed have become more and more violent (see Table 3). For example, the number of gang members convicted of capital murder increased 22.44 percent from 2006 to 2008.

In 2007, the fiscal cost of incarceration for convicted gang members was approximately \$84 million. The cost for those on probation was approximately \$2 million.

Table 1. Top 10 Gangs in Florida Prisons, 2006-2008

	Date		
	7/31/2006	7/31/2007	7/31/2008
Latin Kings	571	684	784
Gangster Disciples	233	252	337
Folk Nation	234	263	262
Crips	204	224	262
Black Gangster Disciples	175	201	238
White Supremist	195	209	196
Neta/Netas	137	198	204
Insane Gangster Disc	122	158	213
Bloods	120	139	195
Sur XIII	74	100	144

Table 2. Florida Counties With the Highest Conviction Rates, 2006-2008

	Date		
	7/31/2006	7/31/2007	7/31/2008
Miami-Dade	477	548	604
Hillsborough	382	519	621
Broward	427	475	519
Orange	215	254	343
Pinellas	180	235	311
Polk	182	220	273
Palm Beach	173	209	258
Duval	170	201	245
Volusia	96	120	152
Manatee	83	103	125

Tracking Gang Members

To monitor the increase in gang members, the Florida DOC has assigned STG coordinators to each of the 62 major institutions. With regard to community corrections, there are STG coordinators in every judicial circuit that monitors gang activity for those on supervised probation.

The Security Threat Intelligence Unit corresponds daily with each coordinator on such things as officer safety bulletins, law enforcement bulletins and any pertinent information dealing with new gangs organizing within the prisons or in the community. The unit is currently located in the department's central office in Tallahassee and consists of a correctional programs administrator and criminal analyst.

This past year, a majority of the institutions began holding monthly STG meetings. Those who attend include the assistant warden, colonel, major, STG coordinator, recreational officer and chaplain, as well as classification, medical and mailroom staff. These meetings assist the institution in communicating with staff and reviewing housing/job assignments to ensure there is not a heavy concentration of a certain gang being housed or working together. The staff also discuss such concerns as newly identified groups, confiscated gang documents and gang-related mail.

Community corrections STG coordinators attend local multiagency gang task force meetings to obtain intelligence regarding gang activity in the community and to notify law enforcement of gang members on probation. Probation officers partner with local law enforcement to assist in probation-violation arrests and to ensure those on house arrest are complying with their conditions of probation.

The DOC uses an internal gang database, known as the Security Threat Operational Review and Monitoring System, to track gang members. The database was designed to assist

not only the department but also other law enforcement agencies in collecting intelligence that aids in the management of groups or individuals who pose a threat to correctional facilities and communities.

The monitoring system generates several reports that are available to law enforcement, correctional institutions and community corrections. Thirty days prior to the release of a gang member from prison, the Security Threat Intelligence Unit provides notification to law enforcement agencies. The notification of releases is sent to the county in which the inmate was convicted and to the county where he or she will be residing, if different from the county of conviction. The information includes a photograph of the inmate, the address where he or she will be residing, gang alliance, a list of nicknames/street names, criminal history and a description of tattoos. The intelligence unit also creates reports for law enforcement that list gang members who are on probation.

Reports are also available to correctional institutions and community corrections employees. Institutional reports include information on gang members' housing assignments, job assignments and ranks. This information allows correctional staff to monitor the gang activity at their facilities. Community corrections reports include information on gang members who are currently on probation, the supervising probation officer and which gang members are being released from prison to probation.

To assist law enforcement in obtaining as much information as possible on gang members identified within corrections, the DOC partnered with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement in September 2008 to begin adding the more than 7,000 gang members in prison and on probation into the statewide gang database, known as InSite. This information will be available to all federal, state and local law enforcement agencies that have access to InSite.

Table 3. Primary Offenses of Incarcerated Gang Members, 2006-2008

	Date		
	7/31/2006	7/31/2007	7/31/2008
Robbery with weapon	519	601	766
Burglary, dwelling	351	442	554
Capital murder	294	333	360
Robbery without weapon	183	238	302
Second-degree murder	206	237	271
Drugs, manufacture/sale/purchase	168	235	307
Burglary, armed	152	204	225
Aggravated battery	128	153	193
Weapons, possession	103	146	207
Burglary, structure	102	125	165

Sharing Intelligence

During the past 10 years, the sharing of intelligence has grown between law enforcement and corrections. Law enforcement agencies are realizing that corrections can offer valuable intelligence to prosecution investigations. The intelligence unit receives at least 30 requests daily for information from the community and law enforcement. These requests include the following:

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Phone monitoring. Inmates within the DOC are allowed to make collect phone calls to approved numbers using a pay phone inside the institution. Every phone call is recorded and is admissible in a court of law, and many times conversations include information on current or past investigations.

Visitation records. If an individual wishes to visit an inmate, he or she must fill out an application, which includes a background check. Law enforcement finds this information useful while conducting an investigation because they can monitor who is visiting the inmate, how often they visit, and if visitors are gang members from the community.

Graffiti analysis. Schools, law enforcement and private citizens submit photos of community graffiti to the intelligence unit for analysis. Analyzing this information will show what gangs are frequenting those areas and allow law enforcement to document these gangs, as well as individual gang members.

Individual gang member reports. Gang members answer a detailed questionnaire that asks when and where he or she joined the gang; who the leaders are; and who the gang's allies and enemies are. If an inmate has any tattoos, photographs are taken and attached to the report, as are any gang-related documents that have been confiscated. These documents include gang drawings, gang prayers and hit lists.

Statewide Gang-Reduction Strategy

In July 2007, Florida State Attorney General Bill McCollum asked the heads of several state agencies and associations to help develop Florida's first statewide gang-reduction strategy. Representatives were from the following groups:

- Department of Corrections;
- Department of Juvenile Justice;
- Florida Department of Law Enforcement;
- Department of Children and Families;
- Department of Education;
- Office of Drug Control;
- Florida Highway Patrol;
- Florida Sheriff's Association;
- Florida Police Chiefs Association;
- Prosecuting Attorneys Association; and
- Florida Gang Investigators Association.

In December 2007, a summit was held in Tallahassee with participants from around the state including community leaders, intervention and prevention specialists, law enforcement, prosecutors, correctional officers, probation officers and educators. This summit was instrumental in the development of the gang-reduction strategy, which was unveiled in June 2008. The strategy's mission is to increase the safety of Florida's citizens by empowering the state's youths to reject gangs as a viable option and by substantially reducing gang-related crime and violence.

The strategy is based on three pillars: prevention/intervention, law enforcement and rehabilitation/reentry. In recent decades, law enforcement has been the primary entity attempting to control gang activity in Florida's communities. And it will be more efficient when it is partnered with prevention and reentry efforts within these communities and throughout the state. The key to the success of the gang-reduction strategy is coordination and cooperation among federal, state and local governments, law enforcement, elected officials, community leaders, and the business community.

This effort mapped out a path for Florida to work together in ridding its communities of gang activity. To begin on this path, the state was divided into seven regions and a gang strategy task force developed within each region. Now, it is the responsibility of each region to develop its own plan of action, set timetables and carry it out. The hope is that each region's information will be shared throughout the state, assisting other communities in finding the best resources to combat gang activity.

Revised Statutes

During the 2008 legislative session, legislators voted on numerous changes to Florida statutes relating to criminal gangs and their activities. All of these changes went into effect Oct. 1, 2008.

First, the statute dealing with gangs, titled "Street Terrorism Enforcement & Prevention," was renamed "Criminal Gang Enforcement and Prevention." The revised statute not only deals with gangs on the street, but also includes new definitions for hate groups and terrorist organizations. The goal is to start targeting the actual gang itself, not just the members.

Other additions to Florida Statutes are:

- F.S. 775.13 requires certain felons whose offenses related to criminal gangs to register with the sheriff's office, identifying themselves as such an offender.
- F.S. 775.0846 states that no person may possess a bulletproof vest while acting alone or with one or more individuals when he or she commits or attempts to commit any criminal gang-related offense under Chapter 974.
- F.S. 947.18 prohibits certain probationers or community controllees from communicating with criminal gang members.
- F.S. 947.1405 prohibits certain parolees from communicating with criminal gang members.
- F.S. 874.11 states that any person who, for the purpose of benefiting, promoting or furthering the interests of a criminal gang, uses electronic communication to intimidate or harass other individuals, or to advertise his or her presence in the community, including, but not limited to, such activities as distributing, selling, transmitting or posting on the Internet any audio, video or still image of criminal activity, commits a felony of the third degree.

- F.S. 874.10 states that any person who knowingly initiates, organizes, plans, finances, directs, manages or supervises criminal gang-related activity commits a felony of the first degree.
- F.S. 944.47(1)(a)6 makes it a third-degree felony to intentionally and unlawfully introduce a cell phone or defined "portable communication device" inside the secure perimeter of any state correctional institution without prior official authorization or consent.

Safer Communities

The sharing of information between corrections and the law enforcement community is becoming more vital, as is the role of legislators in maintaining statutes related to gang activity. In working together to combat gang activity inside the prison system and in the community, corrections and law enforcement seek to create safer environments.

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