

Commentary



Clearly, effectively and systemically addressing security threat group activity will reduce criminal activity and improve public safety.

Institutional Management of Security Threat Groups

By J. David Donahue

Commissioner

Indiana Department of Correction

Gang or security threat group activity has increased dramatically throughout the nation in recent years. This increase has a parallel impact in the correctional environment as increasingly more individuals with gang affiliation enter the criminal justice system and are incarcerated. Gang activity does not stop at the prison gates but continues inside unless addressed within correctional facilities and between correctional facilities and the community. Consequently, the management of security threat groups presents challenges for correctional officials.

A security threat group member, in a broad sense, is an individual or group of individuals who set themselves apart from others, pose a threat to the security or safety of staff or offenders, or are disruptive to programs or the orderly management of the facility. The key to effective management is the proactive identification of security threat group members, particularly those individuals who play key or leadership roles in these groups and those who pose a high security risk to the facility.

Each jurisdiction should develop security threat group identifiers particular to its offender population and environment. These identifiers may include tattoos, wearing or displaying gang colors or symbols, association with known gang members (including family members), and intelligence information from confidential informants and law enforcement agencies.

Following the identification of an individual with gang affiliation, his or her activities should be monitored. Staff training specific to the identification of security threat group affiliation and monitoring is essential. Key staff should be identified to manage this population on-site. The responsibilities of these staff members should include monitoring this population's trends and patterns, developing management and housing strategies, programming tracts, and collaborative monitoring and information sharing with supervising authorities and law enforcement agencies following release. No less important is the development of protocols to assist gang-affiliated offenders who choose to disassociate themselves with further gang activity.

Two systemic management strategies that have helped the Indiana Department of Correction successfully manage security threat groups inside its institutions are the implementation of a zero-tolerance policy for gang signs, symbols and activities and the monitoring of offender telephone calls. These policies have reduced intimidation tactics and conflict among gangs and reduced offender-on-offender and offender-on-staff assaults. They also have provided avenues for the identification of victims and potential victims of gang activity and intelligence on gang-related drug and contraband trafficking activity.

Beyond corrections, jurisdictions need to actively work with each other,

law enforcement agencies and the National Major Gang Task Force, sharing intelligence in a coordinated effort to address and reduce gang activity in communities. Indiana Department of Correction records reveal that identified juvenile gang members are significantly more likely to become involved in the adult criminal justice system than are non-gang members. All entities within a jurisdiction need to work together to determine the extent of security threat group activity within their jurisdiction as well as share information to effectively address this extensive problem. Education and training in the activities, culture and networks of security threat groups are mandatory for professionals working in the criminal justice field. This training is particularly important in effectively addressing the cultural diversity and fundamental philosophies of the many security threat groups across the nation.

Clearly, effectively and systemically addressing security threat group activity will reduce criminal activity and improve public safety. Indiana, under the leadership of Gov. Mitch Daniels, has taken significant steps to address this public concern and increase public safety statewide.

Law enforcement professionals will be coming together at the 12th Annual National Major Gang Task Force Conference hosted by Gov. Daniels in conjunction with the Indiana Department of Correction on September 10-13, 2006, in Indianapolis to share information and ideas and to network. ♦