

Department of Public Safety

Utah Department of Public Safety

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BRIEF PART 1: INTERNAL SCAN

Utah's aging population is a source of concern for the Utah Department of Public Safety (DPS) and will continue to have an increasing impact as the state's aging population size continues to grow. This increase in the over-55 population has already resulted in changes to the operations of the Department, with most of the DPS sub-agencies already considering how to best serve Utah's aging population, and making plans for the future on how to address or respond to the issues or changes identified in this internal scan. The DPS 2030 Group, consisting of a representative from each of the major sub-agencies within the Department, convened to discuss these challenges and offers the following briefing.

The aging motor vehicle driver presents challenges for DPS sub-agencies including those responsible for driver licensing, traffic law enforcement, and the overall public/highway safety aspect. National traffic studies have recognized that there is a general slowing of cognitive and reaction times, diminished eyesight, and reduced physical mobility for drivers over the age of 55.

Utah has an established system to track drivers with known medical conditions which may affect the person's driving ability, and this tracking system applies regardless of age. Nationally, there is discussion of the need to increase the scrutiny of the physical condition and abilities of older drivers, and possibly implement mandatory retesting of older driver skills. One concession currently in place in Utah regarding older drivers is a

statutory mandate for drivers age 65 and older to have a vision check every five years (instead of ten) as a condition of driver license renewal. However, more restrictive changes to Utah's driver licensing laws regarding aging drivers would likely result in significant legislative and even legal challenges. Also, increased levels of practical driving skills testing for older drivers, and any subsequent tracking, would not be something that the Driver License Division could absorb without increases in funding and authorized full-time employees (FTE).

Law enforcement also has traffic safety concerns as older drivers tend to drive slower as they notice their slower cognitive and reaction times, and cope with diminished eyesight. This often results in the impeding of the traffic flow, especially on high-speed highways and the Interstate system. Another issue voiced by law enforcement is that older drivers seem to have a difficult time understanding the new traffic laws and infrastructure such as high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, roundabout intersections, etc.

A task faced by both law enforcement and the Driver License Division, which is possibly the most difficult, is the removal of an older person's driving privilege. This is a very emotional issue as it seems to be one of the "rights" or "freedoms" that many older drivers desire to retain at almost any cost, even at the risk of being a safety concern for the general motoring public. This loss of driving privilege is commonly associated with a lower quality of life due to being "shut-in" and losing social contact with the community. There are even reported health issues such as depression and the loss of mental alertness. While it can be said that aging Utahns can use the public transit system, coverage is not as extensive as desired and is especially challenging in the more rural areas of the state.

There are also general safety concerns for the aging population in Utah which present challenges for other DPS sub-agencies including those responsible for fire regulations, pedestrian and bicyclist safety, and the overall homeland security and emergency situation aspect. Most disasters are first handled at a local level and utilize those resources first. In cases where the emergency is escalated to the state level, the scope may overwhelm the available resources or the ability to move and provide those resources in a timely manner. Due to privacy laws, it is difficult for emergency dispatchers to access important medical information that would assist emergency responders in addressing the immediate needs of the aging population.

Other general safety concerns include the tendency of persons age 70+ to neglect to install or adequately maintain, due to decreased mobility, safety equipment such as smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Also, those age 70+ tend to become immobile or hide in fire or emergency situations which increases the likelihood of being killed or injured, and poses increased dangers for fire and other emergency response persons, as demonstrated recently in the Hurricane Katrina disaster response. The increasing number of senior-specific and assisted-living communities will also magnify the challenges for emergency responders in any disaster situation.

Currently, DPS offers some training and resources to local government agencies to help them prepare for seniors in their local disaster response plans. An example of a DPS effort to prepare for the future is a pilot program initiated by the Communications Bureau office in Price to form a voluntary registry of senior citizens with special needs. This information is provided to emergency responders so they are better prepared to assist the person while considering their unique personal situation, and is also used as a

community “watch” program to check on those who do not have an established family response network.

The Department is also facing a significant number of human resource issues and challenges regarding the aging workforce. The retirement of state workers in the baby-boomer-category (many with 20-30 years of experience) has exceeded the number of qualified employees that are being hired to replace them. This “brain drain” or institutional knowledge loss has significantly affected every DPS division and bureau.

Other human resource challenges include the widening difference in work attitudes and ethics of an older vs. younger work force, with older workers typically more reliable, dependable and experienced, and desiring to stay with the agency for longer than three to five years. Alternately, the training priorities and needs have changed significantly with an aging workforce, with many older workers struggling to adapt to new technology and work methods and feeling disconnected with the younger staff members within the agency.

Finally, the Department’s Peace Officer Standards Training (POST) program faces issues in providing training to prospective law enforcement officers statewide. The cadet of twenty years ago was typically in the 20-29 age-group, with a few in their 30s. Recently, there has been a significant upward trend in the average age of cadets similar to the upward trend in the age of job applicants. The older candidates find that law enforcement positions require the ability to multi-task, perform new and complex computer tasks, and that they must have an above average ability to see, hear and remember. Many older cadets find this challenging, which has resulted in an evolution

process of the curriculum at POST, and a rethinking of teaching methods to provide for the learning needs of both the younger and the more mature applicants.

BRIEF PART 2: PRIORITIZATION

As the DPS 2030 Group crafted the Work Plan for this project and considered how to prioritize the overarching issues facing DPS as a result of the aging population, a modified “Nominal Group Technique” was identified. This technique was selected to allow all members to choose issues that have significant meaning and impact for their particular agency. After completion of the Internal Scan as detailed in Brief Part 1, it was apparent to the group that there are three issues of significant interest to DPS sub-agencies. The group elected to select all three for inclusion as DPS’s priority issues.

The aging motor vehicle driver likely presents one of the most complex issues identified in this document. The increasing national interest in scrutinizing an older driver’s skills and physical condition is generally acknowledged as crucial to a safe driving and pedestrian environment. However, the loss of driving privileges has a significant emotional impact on many aging Utahns as they face the challenges of finding alternate transportation, and the possibility of social isolation. This issue impacts the Utah Highway Patrol, the Driver License Division and the Highway Safety Office.

General (non-driving) safety concerns for the aging may be the most challenging issue for DPS sub-agencies to address. These far ranging issues include emergency response concerns, pedestrian safety for seniors, and basic personal safety. This issue impacts the Division of Homeland Security, the Fire Marshall’s Office, the Bureau of Criminal Identification, the Utah Highway Patrol, and the Highway Safety Office.

The human resource issues related to the aging workforce may be the easiest to address for DPS, as this is a common concern throughout the public and private sector. This important issue will have an effect on every sub-agency within the Department.

BRIEF PART 3: RESPONSE PLAN

The DPS Response Plan focuses on the three identified priority areas and details the actions needed to accomplish the realistic and attainable results desired within the next two years. Specific responses include:

Priority Issue #1:

Monitor the driving skills of the aging driver through a combination of education, self regulation, and continued oversight by DPS sub-agencies.

Actions:

- Explore a partnership with the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) to promote and expand the acclaimed Driver Safety Program for drivers age 50+
- Monitor Legislative proposals, such as mandatory Driver License Office visits for renewal of drivers age 75+, and provide statistical information to the Legislature
- Continue the Driver Improvement Program to monitor driving skills and provide appropriate limitations such as speed, time of day, and geographical driving area
- Explore the feasibility of adding age-based aspects to the Driver Improvement Program such as skills testing
- Provide driver license examiners with additional training on older driver issues
- Promote a public information and education (PI&E) program focusing on self-regulation by the aging driver

- Explore a free or highly discounted public transportation (Trax or bus) pass for seniors 75+ who voluntarily surrender their driver license

Results

The results desired by DPS include an ongoing PI&E program (through the Driver License Division, Utah Highway Patrol and the Highway Safety Office) using broadcast and print media that focuses on self regulation by older drivers, increasing the participation in driver safety programs by drivers age 50+, and a reduction in the number of drivers age 75+ who are involved in a motor vehicle crash with an injury or fatality.

Priority Issue #2:

Promote programs to address the general safety concerns for the aging population using a combination of education and community involvement.

Actions

- Solicit voluntary participation by seniors in a statewide special-needs registry as part of Utah's disaster preparedness
- Encourage an expansion of the Neighborhood Watch Program to include watching for clues of seniors in distress such as an accumulation of mail and/or newspapers
- Promote neighbor-to-neighbor disaster preparedness plans, possibly using existing faith-based infrastructure, to assist seniors with fire prevention and detection programs including a smoke and carbon monoxide detector battery replacement program
- Include specific senior education components as part of a statewide pedestrian safety program

- Ask elementary school children who receive fire safety training to share this information with grandparents
- Encourage community-oriented policing to address the needs of senior citizens

Results

DPS desires to have a voluntary special-needs emergency response registry maintained by the Division of Homeland Security, to implement a statewide pedestrian safety program through the Highway Safety Office with specific senior education components, and to engender community participation through family, neighbor-to-neighbor, and Neighborhood Watch Programs, and by local police, fire and medical service providers.

Priority Issue #3:

Use DPS programs to reduce the internal human resource impact of the aging workforce.

Actions

- Develop and implement an effective and formal mentoring program to reduce the institutional knowledge loss as a result of retirements, and provide a solid base of promotable candidates for future Department positions
- Provide an opportunity for DPS retirees to have a role in a mentoring or institutional education program for current DPS staff members
- Use DPS's Professional Development Center to continue to develop training methods suitable for an aging workforce
- Interview internal subject-matter experts and others to develop a forecast of the critical skills desired in future DPS staff members

Results

DPS anticipates a formal mentoring program will be administered Department-wide for DPS staff using current and retired Department members as the mentor pool, and to have a forecast of the critical skills and education desired by DPS of new and current staff members in the future.