

Local law enforcement departments use data-driven approach to fight crime

by Jolanie Martinez

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Law enforcement agencies from across the Rio Grande Valley gathered at Weslaco City Hall Wednesday to attend a workshop for Data Driven Approaches to Crime and Safety (D-DACTS). The D-DACTS model was created by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that found a connection between car crashes and crimes.

With the analysis of crime and crash data, law enforcement agencies can use the tool to find the most effective and efficient methods in deploying their police officers within the community.

The goal of using D-DACTS is to reduce crimes, car crashes and ultimately social harm.

Daniel Howard, the project manager for the International Association of Directors of Law Enforcement, hosted the D-DACTS workshop and says the focus is not on the tickets or arrests, but the mentality of both the officers and citizens.

“I’ve often said, ‘We’re never going to arrest your way to a lower crime rate, you’re never going to sit there and give enough tickets to lower your traffic crashes,’” Howard said. “It’s about changing mindset, not just as officers, but more importantly the community’s mindsets, as well.” Weslaco police adopted the D-DACTS philosophy about two years ago after being labeled as one of the most dangerous cities in Texas. Since then, Weslaco police public information officer Eric Hernandez says they have seen tremendous success with a total crime reduction of 26 percent and burglaries dropping at 37 percent through a large number of traffic and pedestrian stops.

“What we did is basically have high intensity traffic contacts and pedestrian contacts in high crime rate areas,” Hernandez said. “Once you do that, you’re making just as much contact as you can with individuals so what happens there is you’re going run into a criminal.”

Hernandez adds that citizens have the misconception of police officers making traffic stops for simply issuing citations, but Weslaco police wants to address that they are not trying to generate any type of revenue and that 70 percent of the stops made end with a written warning. Harlingen police have already implemented the model, while Pharr and Palmhurst are considering in adopting D-DACTS.