

CHAPTER 11
EL PROTECTOR PROGRAM
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CHAPTER 11

EL PROTECTOR PROGRAM

1. GENERAL. The El Protector Program (EPP) is a proactive program focusing on bringing traffic safety education to the Spanish-speaking population. This program facilitates extensive interactions with the Hispanic community by recognizing and respecting cultural differences and by addressing this community in their native language. Information about traffic safety laws and good traffic safety behaviors is provided through Spanish media, participation in local community venues and civic functions, and the development of public and private industry partnerships. The EPP also maximizes its statewide outreach to the Hispanic community through the effective use of the media. The EPP emphasizes education rather than enforcement, which creates and cultivates a more positive attitude towards law enforcement.

2. THE EL PROTECTOR CONCEPT.

a. In 1987, an analysis of traffic crash data indicated that the incidence of victims with Hispanic surnames involved in fatal motor vehicle crashes and other serious traffic safety violations was significantly higher than that of the general population. This overrepresentation of Hispanics in traffic fatalities was, in part, attributed to limited proficiency in the English language, combined with cultural differences, which contributed to certain unsafe driving behaviors.

b. The EPP was developed to focus on specific factors related to cultural differences by providing education and support to improve traffic safety awareness and promote safer driving habits. The EPP continues as a proactive traffic safety outreach program for the Hispanic communities. It places special emphasis on people with limited or no English-speaking abilities. As a bilingual/bicultural program, this program provides public education through effective dialogue with the Hispanic community rather than focusing specifically on enforcement efforts.

c. The goal of the EPP is to reduce the number of fatal and injury traffic crashes and victims killed and injured involving Hispanic/Latino drivers. Activities are designed to educate and inform, encourage positive traffic safety behaviors, and build better relations between the Hispanic community and law enforcement agencies.

d. The driving force and focus of this program is the use of a uniformed officer of Hispanic ancestry, known as "El Protector," who provides traffic safety education and serves as a role model for the Hispanic community. Through this important spokesperson, the EPP carries out its activities.

e. This manual describes the purpose, benefits, and scope of the EI Protector traffic safety program. This chapter also serves as a guide for Area offices and law enforcement agencies by outlining the steps for setting up and operating a local EPP.

3. PROGRAM BACKGROUND. The U.S. has seen a dramatic increase in immigrants, especially those from Mexico and other Latin American countries. While Hispanics in the U.S. make up approximately 19.5 percent of the nation's population of 336.9 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020 Census), the U.S. Census Bureau projects the Hispanic population will continue to grow well into the next century. Many Hispanic Americans are relatively recent arrivals to the U.S., while others are multi-generational. According to U.S. census data, Spanish is still the most common language, next to English, spoken at home.

4. DATA COLLECTION/ANALYSIS.

a. The misconceptions Hispanics may exhibit towards U.S. traffic laws are due, in part, to cultural and language differences, particularly in dealing with occupant restraint protection, driving under the influence (DUI), and pedestrian safety. Many Hispanics, new to the U.S., may have come to escape the poverty or political unrest of their own countries and have never had the opportunity to learn about traffic safety laws. Others came from countries where traffic safety laws were neither aggressively enforced nor encouraged.

b. This lack of understanding of traffic safety laws and their importance was reflected in 1987 when the CHP analyzed its traffic crash data. This analysis revealed that, in some communities, Hispanics represented 25 percent of the population but were involved in 65 percent of all fatal traffic crashes. In addition, DUI arrests for motorists with Hispanic surnames were as high as 95 percent in some areas. Analyses of data in other CHP field Divisions showed a similar overrepresentation of Hispanics in fatal traffic crashes, many of which were the result of unsafe driving practices.

c. Additional studies into the incidence of motor vehicle crashes involving Hispanics indicated language and cultural differences often factored significantly in the shaping of the Hispanic communities' understanding of the importance of traffic safety rules, as well as its attitudes toward law enforcement officers.

5. THE EI PROTECTOR PROGRAM/RESPONSE.

a. To address this disproportionately high incidence of traffic fatalities among members of the Hispanic community, the California Office of Traffic Safety awarded a grant to the CHP to develop and implement a traffic safety and community outreach program. The result was the first EPP.

b. At the center of this program is the Community Outreach Officer/EI Protector¹; a Spanish-speaking officer selected to serve as a spokesperson on behalf of the CHP. In addition to being a CHP spokesperson, the officer serves as a role model, community leader, and problem-solver in the Hispanic community. To achieve the professional image of an EI Protector, all uniformed employees shall wear the tan work uniform. The EPP cultivates working relationships and partnerships with leaders of the Hispanic community and others who are interested in the well-being of the Hispanic community. Some of the venues where EI Protector has successfully established community outreach and partnership opportunities are:

- (1) Town Hall meetings/community groups.
- (2) Churches.
- (3) Schools.
- (4) Migrant health clinics.
- (5) Spanish language media.
- (6) Places of employment.
- (7) Migrant camps.

c. After more than a year of promoting the first EPP, primarily through traffic safety television, radio shows, and public service announcements, EI Protector spokespersons throughout the state continued conducting thousands of presentations to the Hispanic communities. Topics shared then by the EI Protector spokespersons continue to be shared now. They include the following: laws about safety belts, the correct use of child safety seats, and the dangers of drinking and driving, with a culturally sensitive emphasis on the importance of personal and family safety.

¹ It is important to note an officer need not be assigned to full-time EPP duties in order to implement the EI Protector concept and Community Outreach and Marketing Section philosophy.

d. The success of the EPP has subsequently led to the development of similar programs throughout California and other states, including Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Washington, and Illinois.

6. RESULTS/ASSESSMENT. At the end of the program's first two years, El Protector's impact proved dramatic. Hispanic traffic fatalities dropped from a pre-project level of 65 percent to 33 percent in the first year and 42 percent in the second year. This reduction in traffic fatalities demonstrated the focus on traffic safety education rather than enforcement activity, utilizing the El Protector concept, was indeed a success. By 1990, the EPP became an established CHP program designed to develop and maintain a viable Hispanic outreach program.

NOTE: Supporting the Department's community outreach philosophy, the program's results have included improved community relations, improved quality of life, decreased health care costs, decreased auto-related crimes, such as vehicle thefts, and increased recruitment of CHP officers of ethnic descent.

7. EL PROTECTOR PROGRAM ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

a. Program Administrator. The Community Outreach and Marketing Section's (COMS) commander serves as the Department's designated program administrator. The COMS commander is responsible for the effectiveness of the EPP within the Department and for any reporting requirements to the Commissioner's office.

b. Program Coordinator. The COMS provides overall coordination of the program. The COMS program coordinator includes implementation of the Department's EPP activities, plans specific strategies designated to accomplish the Department's community outreach objectives, and presentations for the EPP.

c. Division Commanders. The Division commander is responsible for program implementation and reporting at the Division level. The Division shall select an EPP coordinator.

d. Division Coordinators. The Division coordinator is responsible for coordinating the EPP at the Division level. The Division coordinator is responsible for ensuring adequate departmental participation in community relations/involvement activities and coordinating and conducting community outreach activities within the Division. The Division is responsible for program implementation and reporting at the Division level.

e. Area Commanders. The Area commander is responsible for appointing an Area EPP coordinator and promoting the EPP within the command and community.

f. Area Coordinators. The EPP coordinators are directly accountable to the EPP Area commander. Such activities and responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

- (1) Establishing good rapport with the Hispanic community and local community groups.
- (2) Joining local Hispanic community associations and civic groups.
- (3) Attending and representing the Department at local community functions and meetings.
- (4) Participating in local community cultural events.
- (5) Focusing the program on the education of the Hispanic population regarding law enforcement issues, traffic safety, child passenger safety, DUI, and other relevant topics.
- (6) Meeting with the local media, establishing regular contacts for informational talk show opportunities, and translating traffic safety messages.
- (7) Setting up and conducting educational seminars in the local Hispanic community.
- (8) Establishing a rapport with local schools and conducting school traffic safety presentations.
- (9) Assisting Area commanders and public information officers in implementing the EPP at the Area level.
- (10) Assisting the Division Recruitment Coordinator through the EPP's partnerships as a medium to achieve a more diversified Department reflective of the state's population.
- (11) Prepare written correspondence, provide translation services, and review other written materials as requested.

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ANNEX A
EL PROTECTOR LOGO



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