

Special Report

Driving While Intoxicated Incidents

July 2017



The Austin Police Department's (APD) process for gathering Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) incident data appears to be repeatable. However, APD has routinely changed the offense types included when determining the number of DWI incidents whenever they identified opportunities to improve accuracy. In addition, APD recently changed to a State database as a source for DWI incidents that involve a crash. These changes affect the accuracy of DWI incident data used by the department for decision-making and the consistency of reporting on DWI incidents.

Objective

The objectives of this special request were to determine if the Austin Police Department (APD) is gathering statistics on DWI incidents in a repeatable and consistent manner, what techniques APD uses for analysis of DWI data, and whether these techniques have changed over time.

Background

DWI incidents = DWI incidents that involve crashes + DWI incidents that do not involve crashes

Austin Police Department (APD) collects and analyzes data related to Driving While Intoxicated (DWI) incidents within the City of Austin. In addition, APD receives and responds to various requests for DWI incident information (for both DWI incidents that involve a crash and those that do not involve a crash) from various stakeholders including the City Council, other City departments, the media, and the public.

When someone drives while intoxicated in Austin, APD's enforcement efforts can result in an arrest either because an officer identifies an impaired driver or because the impaired driver is involved in a crash that APD responds to. APD officers that make DWI arrests are required to document information in two databases:

- for each DWI incident that involves a crash, the APD officers are required to document information relating to the crash in a Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Crash Records Information System (TxDOT database); and
- for all DWI incidents APD officers are required to document information relating to the arrest in a departmental Crime Records Management System (APD database).

What We Learned

Austin Police Department management has routinely changed the offense types included when determining the number of DWI incidents whenever they identified opportunities to improve accuracy. In addition, APD recently changed to a State database as a source for DWI incidents that involve a crash.

Our understanding of APD's process for collecting, analyzing, and reporting DWI incidents is mainly based on testimonial evidence from APD staff and management. In order to determine the impact of changes in the methodologies used by APD, we also analyzed DWI incidents data from APD's Crime Records Management System (APD database) and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Crash Records Information System (TxDOT database). However, we did not perform data reliability tests to determine the accuracy of the information in the two databases.

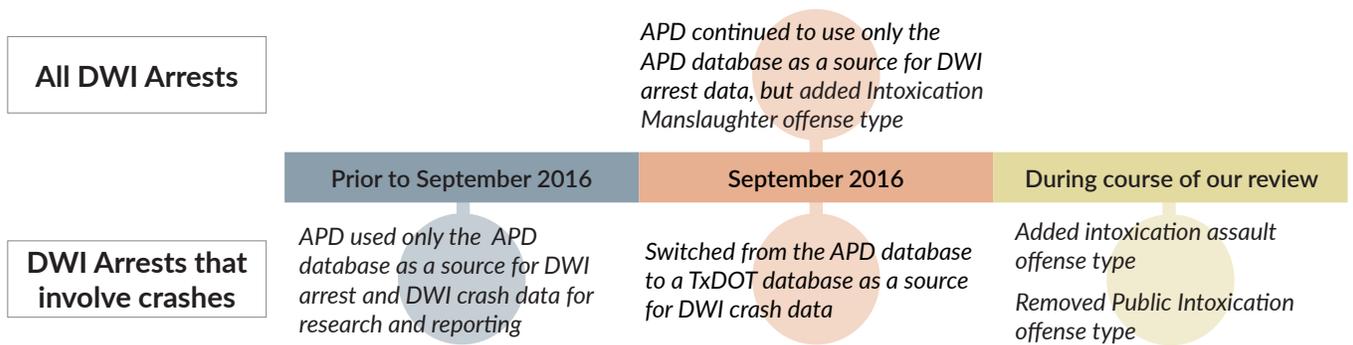
According to APD management, APD has historically analyzed DWI incident statistics by comparing the DWI incidents over time in order to identify trends. In addition to providing DWI incident statistics to various stakeholders, APD uses this data for making departmental operational decisions about resource allocation, including reorganizing staff.

The process for gathering DWI incident data appears to be repeatable. However, the way this data is classified in the databases makes it difficult for staff to extract relevant DWI incident offense types. There is no specific identification code for all DWI crashes in the APD database.

APD has routinely changed the techniques used for analysis of DWI data. According to APD management, the methodology used to capture DWI incident data is updated whenever the department identifies ways to produce more accurate data. As such, APD has routinely added and/or removed offense types when determining the number of DWI incidents. These changes, described in more detail below, have resulted in fluctuations in both the overall DWI arrest and crash statistics used for research and/or reported to stakeholders during the scope period October 2013 through March 2017.

In September 2016 APD management switched from the APD database to a TxDOT database as a source for DWI crash data used for research and reporting. According to APD management, APD switched to the TxDOT database because the DWI crash offenses are not consistently documented in the APD database. However, APD continues to use only the APD database to identify DWI arrests, including those that involve a crash.¹

Exhibit 1 APD's DWI Research and Reporting



SOURCE: OCA analysis of information provided by Austin Police Department management (May 2017)

During our review period, APD made changes to the methodology used to determine the number of DWI crashes using the TxDOT database.

In order to determine the number of crashes involving DWI, APD extracts certain types of offenses from the TxDOT database. APD staff indicated that they made changes to the methodology for identifying DWI crashes during our review. These changes impact the DWI crash numbers previously reported from the TxDOT database:

- removed an offense category (public intoxication), previously included, which includes non-DWI charges; and
- added an offense category (intoxication assault), originally omitted, which includes DWI crashes.

Based on our review of DWI crash data from the TxDOT database, these changes would have resulted in a net increase of 27 crashes in the number of DWI crash statistics used for APD research and reporting purposes during the period October 2016 through March 2017.

APD made changes in offense types for DWI incidents that involve crashes, which would have resulted in an increase of previously reported crash statistics.

¹ According to APD management the APD database reflects an accurate number of DWI arrest incidents, but the way information is classified in the database makes it difficult to identify DWI arrest incidents that involve crashes.

Changes in what offense types are selected affect the consistency of APD reporting on DWI arrests.

As noted above APD uses its own database for reporting on DWI arrests. According to APD management, in September 2016 APD began capturing a new offense category (intoxication manslaughter) when extracting DWI arrests from the APD database. Based on our review of DWI arrest data in the APD database, this change would have increased the number of prior DWI arrests used by APD for research and/or reporting purposes during FY 2013 through FY 2016 by an average of approximately 8 crashes annually. Annual increases range between 6 and 10 arrests as shown below. These increases do not appear to be significant given the total number of reported arrests.

APD added a new offense type for DWI arrests, which would have resulted in an increase of previously reported DWI arrest data.

**Exhibit 2
Increase in the number of DWI arrests when offense types are changed**

	FY2013	FY2014	FY2015	FY2016
Number of DWI arrests without Intoxication Manslaughter	6,425	6,119	5,963	5,625
Number of DWI arrests with Intoxication Manslaughter	6,431	6,127	5,973	5,632
Increase in the number of DWI arrests	6	8	10	7

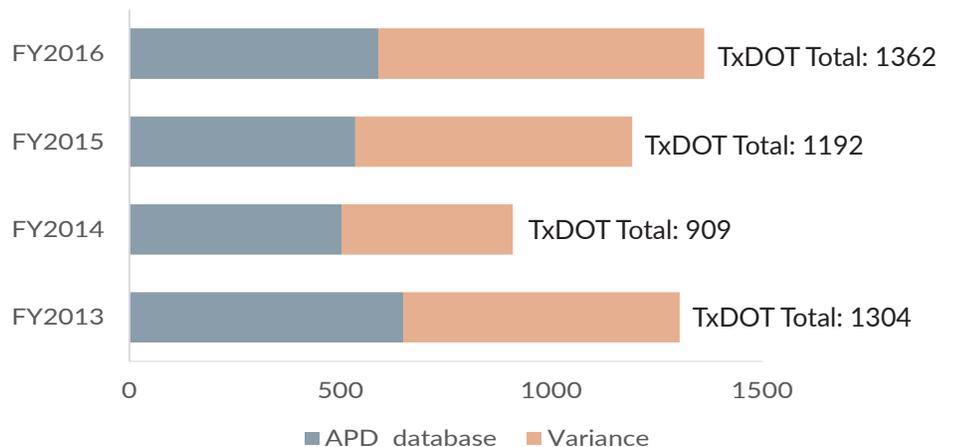
SOURCE: Office of the City Auditor analysis of APD DWI arrest data (May 2017)

Changes in the data source used affect the consistency of APD reporting on DWI crashes.

As indicated above, in September 2016 APD switched from the APD database to the TxDOT database as a source for DWI crash statistics. Based on our comparison of DWI crash data obtained from the TxDOT database with the data from the APD database, the switch increased the DWI crash results in the period from FY 2013 through FY 2016 by an average of 622 crashes annually. The increase in DWI crashes varies between 406 crashes and 772 crashes.

APD switched the source of DWI crash statistics, which increased the DWI crash statistics by an average of 622 (52%) crashes annually.

**Exhibit 3
Variances in DWI Crash Statistics Between TxDOT and APD Databases**



SOURCE: Office of the City Auditor analysis of APD and TxDOT DWI crash data (May 2017)

Why We Did This Report

This report responds to a request from Council Member Pool regarding Austin Police Department DWI incident data.

Scope

The scope of this project included Austin Police Department's activities related to gathering and analyzing DWI incident data from FY2013 to FY 2017 (March).

Methodology

To accomplish our project objectives, we performed the following steps:

- Interviewed key staff in the Austin Police Department about APD's DWI incident activities;
- Reviewed reports and documents provided by Austin Police Department management and staff; and
- Compared DWI incident data from the Austin Police Department Crime Records Management System and the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) Crash Records Information System to determine variances.

Project Type

Special request projects conducted by the Office of the City Auditor are considered non-audit projects under Government Auditing Standards and are conducted in accordance with the ethics and general standards (Chapters 1-3).

The Office of the City Auditor was created by the Austin City Charter as an independent office reporting to City Council to help establish accountability and improve City services. Special requests are designed to answer specific questions to assist Council in decision-making. We do not draw conclusions or make recommendations in these reports.

Team

Neha Sharma, Audit Manager
Henry Katumwa, Auditor-in-Charge

City Auditor

Corrie Stokes

Deputy City Auditor

Jason Hadavi

Office of the City Auditor

phone: (512) 974-2805

email: AustinAuditor@austintexas.gov

website: <http://www.austintexas.gov/auditor>



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