

Area police switching to high-tech pistols

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

A FORD Model T to a modern car. That's how Sgt. Steve Zultowski of the Southfield Police Department compares semi-automatic weapons to police departments' classic six-shot revolvers.

"We found they offer improvements over what our .357 revolvers offered our officers," Zultowski said. Farmington public safety director Frank Lauboff says police departments switch to semiautomatics is like the historic switch from manual to electric typewriters and finally to computers.

"The perceived need to change happened several years ago," said Lauboff, whose department has not yet made the switch. "It's the new technology."

Southfield, Birmingham, Troy, West Bloomfield and the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, which offers police protection to Rochester Hills and Oakland Township, have all made the switch from six-shot revolvers to semiautomatic weapons in the last few years.

BUT NOT EVERY department has yet made the switch. Farmington Hills and Rochester, for example, are in the process of choosing a semiautomatic. Rochester is waiting for budget approval. Farmington Hills, after a lengthy study, is about three or four weeks away from choosing a particular semiautomatic.

SigSauer, Glock, Smith & Wesson and Barretta all make the semiautomatics used by many Oakland County law enforcement agencies.

"You always have to be prepared

'Reloading procedures on revolvers and the way you grip a weapon and the features are dramatically different with the semiautomatics.'

— Richard Niemisto
Farmington Hills police inspector

for the switch. Everyone now on the street has superior firepower," said Capt. Richard Patterson of the Birmingham Police Department, which made the switch in 1987.

The ability to reload quickly is a reason given by most police officials for switching to the semiautomatic weapons, such as the 9mm, which is common among many of the departments that have made the switch in the last few years.

"You would have to reload less in an emergency. That's my main reason for the change to semiautomatics," Rochester police Chief Ted Glynn said.

Consider, police say, the revolver has only six shots. And then the officer has to reload. The semiautomatic, on the other hand, carries 13 to 17 shots in a cartridge that need only be slid into the handle of the weapon. "It's 18 shots versus 6 shots," said Capt. Gerard Carlin of the Oakland County Sheriff's Department.

It's also easier to carry cartridges that provide more shots than separate bullets in the harness officers carry around their waists. "An officer can now carry 40-46 rounds of ammo," said Sgt. Mike Madigan of the West Bloomfield Police Department.

IN ADDITION to offering fast reloading and more firepower, police also mention that officers have improved their shooting accuracy with the semiautomatics.

"We found our officers are shooting better," Zultowski of Southfield said.

Size and weight of the weapon has played somewhat of a role in which weapons departments have chosen, particularly those with women officers. Lt. Bill Tullock of Troy says the six-shot revolver is heavier than most semiautomatics, particularly the Glock, which is used by Troy officers.

"Everyone is not 6 feet tall and 200 pounds," Tullock said.

And like the departments that have already made the switch to semiautomatics, Farmington Hills and Rochester will offer their officers transitional training from a revolver to the semiautomatic.

"Reloading procedures on revolvers and the way you grip a weapon and the features are dramatically different with the semiautomatics," said Inspector Richard Niemisto of the Farmington Hills police.



Inspector Richard Niemisto of the Farmington Hills Police Department shows how to reload silver Smith & Wesson small-frame .45-caliber semiautomatic. Unlike the six-shot revolver, a semiautomatic has a cartridge that holds 15-17 rounds. The cartridge is put into the weapon's handle. The black semiautomatic on the table is a 9mm Smith & Wesson.

SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Hills police close to decision on new weaponry

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Firearms confiscated or seized on the streets generally are more powerful than the firearms used by the Farmington Hills police.

"Right now we don't have the ability to keep pace with the criminal element when it comes to weaponry power," Farmington Hills police Chief William Dwyer said.

That means the so-called criminal element is armed with semi-automatic weapons and the Farmington Hills police are not. But not for long. Farmington Hills is close to buying new semi-automatics though perhaps a bit later in the game than other Oakland County police departments.

The semi-automatics will replace officers' .357-caliber six-shot revolvers, used in

the department since the 1960s.

The planned purchase of 140 semi-automatics is expected to cost more than \$60,000, including leather holsters and training, which is expected to begin in October for the department's 97 sworn officers.

The city council is expected to provide \$25,000 of the tab and the rest will come from narcotics forfeiture money, as allowed by state law.

POLICE WILL buy 43 weapons more than the number of officers because some, such as detectives and Dwyer, for example, will be issued two weapons. They will get a smaller semi-automatic when they work plainclothes. Some weapons also will be in reserve, Dwyer said.

The decision to buy semi-automatics was not made overnight. An eight-member com-

mittee has studied the issue and various types of weapons available in the past year. The committee studied information from the FBI and California Highway Patrol, for example.

"We had information of new things coming down," said Inspector Richard Niemisto, a committee member. "They have recently developed weapons to handle different calibers. We thought we had better wait and study all of them."

The choices of manufacturers are Smith & Wesson, Glock, Barretta and SigSauer. The committee has studied four different calibers including 9mm, 10 mm, 40-caliber, and 45-caliber.

"We've fired a thousand rounds through each of these weapons," Niemisto said.

Increased firepower is a primary reason for the switch from .357-caliber six-shot re-

volvers. But police are also looking for easier reloading, increased round capacity and reliability in the weapon they choose.

Consider that once the chamber of a six-shot revolver is empty an officer must reload one bullet at a time. Reloading is easier and quicker with a semi-automatic. A cartridge with 15-17 rounds is slid into the handle of the weapon.

RELOADING PROCEDURES for a semi-automatic will be part of a training program for officers. "The officers have been trained with a Smith & Wesson .357-caliber revolver. The way you grip the weapon and the features are dramatically different," Niemisto said.

"We want to make sure the officers are proficient with the semi-automatics. But they won't 'unlearn' how to use a revolver," he continued.

While police are looking for greater round capacity and rapid shooting, Niemisto says it's equally important that the weapon chosen is designed appropriately so when fired the weapon is not hazardous to anyone or anything other than the target.

Also to be considered in their choice is the size and weight of the weapon. "We want a weapon that can be easily handled by anyone, regardless of sex and physical stature," Niemisto said.

What to do with the revolvers is also an issue that will probably be determined with city council approval. A fair market price will be given to the revolvers. Officers will be allowed to keep their gun if they want. Dwyer expects that 80-90 percent of the officers will buy their weapons, with the remaining weapons either sold to the authorized dealer or kept in the department.

Cities plan to charge fee to fund recycling program

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Farmington Hills residents Ken Perrin and Robert Nagle want to see a fee to pay for the curbside recycling and composting program that will begin July 1.

"What it boils down to is we feel it's being fed as a fee. A fee is no less popular than a tax," said Nagle, a Kendallwood subdivision resident.

"Get it on the taxes. We will get a benefit out of it from a tax standpoint," Nagle continued.

Perrin had the same opinion. The Castleridge Drive resident said garbage now has a fancy name — solid waste and recycling. But that's no reason to charge a fee when the costs of the program can be put on the tax rate.

At least taxpayers can put their property taxes on their federal income tax and perhaps get something back. With a fee — like water and sewer fees — you don't get anything back, Perrin said.

"Why is the term fee used? Is it to avoid problems with the Headlee Amendment?" Perrin asked.

"No" was the resounding response from Farmington Hills officials. That was no problem with the Headlee constitutional Tax Limitation amendment. And no, recycling and composting costs will not be built into the tax rate.

"WE ARE NOT in violation of the Headlee Amendment because we are well below the Headlee limit. We have two mills we could levy. But we will be any less frustrated if we call it a tax," City Manager William Costick said.

Recycling — at current costs — would cost about four-tenths of a mill in Farmington Hills. "We never considered Headlee. It's never been an issue in our town," Costick said.

Beginning July 1, single family homeowners in Farmington and Farmington Hills will be mandated to separate recyclables and compostables at their curbside.

For that job, Farmington Hills homeowners will pay a \$13.50 quarterly fee. Farmington single family residents will pay \$6 annually, which will be paid in two \$3 payments in July and January, city manager Robert Deadman said.

Condominium owners who are already served by the city of Farmington — 161 units to be exact — on an "individual stop basis," will pay a bit less. They will pay \$52 annually or two \$26 payments.

Farmington Hills, on the other hand, will give condominium a year to jump into the program, unless they are now ready to voluntarily participate.

"Those who want to be included will be included, on a voluntary basis by complex," Mayor Aldo Vagnorzi said.

Perrin asked the Farmington Hills city council to reconsider a fee and levy a tax for the recycling program. Through property taxes, the

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Land to be 'renaturalized'

By Greg Kowalski
staff writer

Portions of West Bloomfield will take on a rustic look thanks to the township board's approval of a "renaturalization" program to replant three areas leading into the community.

The township allocated \$20,000 for the project, which will focus on the median strip at 14 Mile Road and Northwestern Highway, a triangular strip bordering Farmington Hills and a small plot near Northwestern and Farmington Hills.

An additional \$3,000 for the project has been raised in private contributions.

Hundreds of trees, bushes and wildflowers will be planted, said trustee Dennis Vatsis, who is a spon-

sor of the project with the West Bloomfield Renaturalization Committee.

But "This is not just a tree planting," Vatsis said. "This will be a forest." Additionally, new Welcome to West Bloomfield Township signs will be erected at the sites.

Vatsis explained that this is not a beautification project, but a renaturalization program. The land will be turned back to what it was before it was developed, he said.

AS PART OF THE program, the West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation Department is expected to use some of its \$15,000 wildflower planting fund for the replanting on the three sites.

Vatsis said the plan was proposed because the township makes "so

many demands on developers" to keep the area natural that it wasn't fair. "This 'double standard' should not continue," Vatsis said.

Plans for replanting the sites were prepared by Donald Tilton, an environmental expert often consulted by the township. "He and his staff devoted hours of time, free of charge, to this project," Vatsis said.

He added that the renaturalization program will benefit the community for 150 years. "Hopefully this will be the beginning of a love affair with nature."

Planting will begin either immediately or next fall, before or after the hot, dry summer months, Vatsis said.

The Renaturalization Committee plans to next focus on the Commerce Road area leading into the township from the northwest.

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