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BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS
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ONE IN FIVE LARGE LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES OPERATED AN AVIATION UNIT IN 2007

WASHINGTON – In 2007, 201 law enforcement aviation units operated nearly 900 aircraft in 46 states and the District of Columbia, according to a report released today by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) in the Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice. These units, located in agencies with 100 or more sworn officers, employed 3,400 persons and reported expenditures in 2007 of more than \$300 million to purchase, lease or finance and maintain and fuel their aircraft. The findings are from the 2007 Census of Law Enforcement Aviation Units, the first national study of police units operating planes or helicopters.

Approximately 20 percent of all law enforcement agencies with 100 or more sworn officers had aviation units, including 44 state police agencies, 76 sheriffs' offices, 68 municipal police agencies and 13 county police agencies.

Aviation units were involved in both general, patrol-related operations and special operations, such as emergency rescue, counterterrorism and SWAT missions. In 2007, almost all (nine in 10) airborne law enforcement units responded to calls for service, assisted ground units in making arrests, and engaged in foot or vehicle pursuits. Nearly half of the aviation units (47 percent) performed street traffic-related functions, reporting on traffic patterns, accidents, and speed.

Eighty percent of aviation units performed counterterrorism missions, such as conducting critical facility checks on buildings, ports, public utilities, oil refineries, bridges, airports and monuments. Around 90 percent of units engaged in counternarcotics operations and performed other criminal activity surveillance. Nearly 80 percent conducted searches for lost or stranded hikers, boaters or skiers, and approximately 60 percent served a firefighting function in 2007.

During 2007, the 201 aviation units conducted an estimated 384,800 missions and logged approximately 363,000 total flight hours. State police units reported the largest number of flight hours (137,600); municipal police units flew the most missions (189,700).

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Twenty-four percent of the units operated six or more aircraft, 60 percent operated between two and five aircraft, and 16 percent operated one aircraft. Of the almost 900 aircraft in use in 2007, more than twice the number of police helicopters (604) compared to planes (295) were in operation. In half of the aviation units (50 percent), a helicopter was the only form of aircraft flown, while just 12 percent of units flew planes only.

Nearly 70 percent of all aircraft had been purchased by the law enforcement agencies. Approximately 25 percent had been acquired through the Department of Defense's government surplus program, which allows excess military equipment to be transferred to state and local law enforcement agencies. Aviation units in sheriffs' offices had the highest percentage of aircraft obtained through the government surplus program (43 percent), followed by municipal police (21 percent), county police (20 percent), and state police aviation units (15 percent).

Nationwide, about half of the aircraft operated by these agencies were 20 years old or older, and 20 percent of the aircraft in the fleet were five years old or less. Aviation units in sheriffs' offices had the highest percentage of aircraft that were at least 20 years old or older (64 percent).

Of the 3,400 personnel assigned to the aviation units, three-quarters were sworn officers. More than half of the personnel were pilots, and a quarter were tactical flight officers.

Most aviation units had established safety measures, such as having a designated safety manual (89 percent), conducting safety meetings (90 percent), and purchasing private insurance (90 percent). Among the 201 aviation units, three aircraft accidents were reported for 2007, with 32 being reported between 2003 and 2006.

The report *Aviation Units in Large Law Enforcement Agencies, 2007* (NCJ 226672), was written by BJS statistician Lynn Langton. The report can be found at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/abstract/aullea07.htm>.

For additional information about the Bureau of Justice Statistics' statistical reports and programs, please visit the BJS Web site at <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs>.

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The Office of Justice Programs (OJP), headed by Acting Assistant Attorney General Laurie O. Robinson, provides federal leadership in developing the nation's capacity to prevent and control crime, administer justice, and assist victims. OJP has five component bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; and the Office for Victims of Crime. In addition, OJP has two program offices: the Community Capacity Development Office, which incorporates the Weed and Seed strategy, and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking (SMART). More information can be found at <http://www.ojp.gov>.