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As Shooting Spate Persists, 15 Police Leaders Face Transfers

By RICHARD LEZIN JONES

Police Commissioner Bernard B. Kerik will transfer the leaders of more than 15 police commands after a monthlong increase in shootings in the city, officials said.

The transfers, which police officials said would take effect at 12:01 a.m. Thursday, were announced late yesterday and had not been finalized last night.

Officials, however, said that the bulk of the transfers would be in Brooklyn and Queens. At least one command in the Bronx would also be affected.

Although officials said the transfers would involve other units besides those at the precinct level, it was unclear last night what other types of commands would be affected. But officials said that at least one transfer would involve the Housing Unit.

"As they do throughout the course of the year, the police commissioner and the top members of his command staff have assessed the operational needs of the department and have determined that these transfers will best address those needs," said Deputy Inspector Chris Rising, a department spokesman.

Although the transfers are occurring against the backdrop of a fourth consecutive week of increases in shootings compared with the same periods last year, department officials said the moves were not being made in response to the increases.

Officials said that the commissioner hoped to use the transfers as a way to give a wave of young, aspiring commanders a chance to show their leadership skills as retirements and the mayoral transition dilute some of the department's senior leadership.

But according to the department's latest crime statistics, the new commanders face immediate challenges. For the week ended Dec. 2, shootings in the city increased by 14.7 percent — to 39 from 34 — when compared with the same period a year ago.

Murders were up 50 percent — to 15 from 10 — when compared with the same time a year ago.

Those figures come after three weeks in a row in which shootings increased. For the 28-day period ended Dec. 2, shootings were up 41.8 percent — to 166 from 117 — compared with the same 28 days last year.

Despite those increases, the city's overall crime rate is down 12.5 percent against last year.

Criminologists also say that such increases are not uncommon and warn that it would be premature to draw any conclusions about changes in the city's crime trends.

Mr. Kerik and Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani have attributed the increases to the routine undulations in crime data.

Nevertheless, the figures were of enough concern to the commissioner that last night he made a surprise visit to precincts in Brooklyn and Queens to observe and take part in patrols with the rank and file.

Even as officials deflected the assertion that the transfers were a form of discipline, union officials questioned the motivation behind the moves.

"He's the commissioner and he's got every right to do that," John Driscoll, the head of the Captains Endowment Association, said. "But it could be a knee-jerk response to let people know that he's doing something."

Mr. Driscoll said that in the wake of the terror attack, police commanders, like everyone else, had had to adapt and do more than a little learning on the fly.

"These people are working real hard," he said. "They're working 12-hour shifts. They've had people taken from them" to work special duties in the aftermath of Sept. 11.

"If you're going to hold guys accountable," Mr. Driscoll said, "make sure you give them the resources they need."

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