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Shakeup at NYPD

By PHILIP MESSING

Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik has ordered a major shakeup of NYPD brass, reassigning 15 top commanders amid the city's recent crime wave.

The transfers, which take effect at midnight tomorrow, mostly involve patrol commanders in Brooklyn and Queens. There will be at least one in The Bronx. The changes also will affect some top Housing Division cops.

Police officials last night refused to say whether those transferred were coming from precincts that have seen a recent increase in major crimes.

One high-level source insisted the transfers were "not punitive" in response to the rise in crime — saying most, if not all, of those affected were taking on greater responsibilities, filling spots vacated by retirements.

"These guys are not getting whacked ... These transfers are not punishment," the source said. "It's a step up, or greater responsibility, or both."

Deputy Inspector Christopher Rising, asked about the timing of the transfers, said:

"As they do throughout the year, the police commissioner and top members of his command staff have assessed the operational needs of the department and have determined that these transfers will address them."

Still, Kerik has been troubled by the recent upsurge in crime, which threatens to tarnish both his and Mayor Giuliani's record in their final weeks in office.

They have often heralded the city's downward spiral in major crimes during the past few years. Overall, crime has dropped an impressive 17.3 percent since 1999, and the reported 12.5 percent decline so far in 2001 is the largest for the period in five years.

But, as a recent Post investigation showed, the statistics have grown grimmer in the past month.

Shootings jumped a frightening 24 percent over the same period last year, and murders rose more than 7.5 percent.

In one recent week alone, shootings rose 33 percent.

The crime picture took an even darker turn last weekend, when 12 people were slain.

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