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Huntington Beach police may identify suspected drunk drivers on its website

A police official says publicly posting names would not be 'a wall of shame' but send a message that officers are cracking down on a 'significant problem' in Surf City.

By Britney Barnes, Los Angeles Times

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The Huntington Beach Police Department is considering posting the names of drunk-driving suspects on its website as part of a stepped-up strategy to address the problem downtown and citywide.

In a report submitted to the City Council this month, police said drinking and driving is a "significant problem" in Surf City and suggested that publicly posting names sends a message that police are cracking down.

"It's not a wall of shame we're looking to put up," said police Lt. Russell Reinhart. "Public awareness of the problem, and scope of the problem, is one way of addressing any public safety concern."

The Police Department considered publishing the names of those arrested on a drunk driving charge after the Huntington Beach Independent newspaper stopped publishing a weekly list of possible offenders in December, according to the city report.

The Independent decided to drop the standing feature after a change in editorial policy.

Huntington Beach would not be the first Orange County city to publish the name of those arrested on suspicion of drunk driving. Irvine already posts the names of adult arrestees in a wide range of crimes, including drunk driving, on its Police Department website.

For the last three years, on average, Huntington Beach police have made 1,700 drunk-driving arrests a year — the third-highest for cities in California with similar populations in 2008, according to the report.

The city also has the fourth-highest number of alcohol-related traffic collisions for its population.

"We have a murder once every couple of years in Huntington Beach, but we have a dozen or so people killed in alcohol-related crashes every year," Reinhart said.

Reinhart said officers are trying to focus on being proactive instead of reactive when it comes to drinking and driving.