

**ATTENTION: PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEMBERS WILL RECEIVE A UNIQUE PANELIST LINK BY EMAIL. PLEASE USE THIS LINK TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS MEETING.**



## **PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING AGENDA**

**MONDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2023  
9:00 a.m.**

*Pursuant to Assembly Bill 361 and the findings made by CVAG, this meeting will only be conducted via video/teleconferencing.*

### **INSTRUCTIONS FOR PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Members of the public may use the following link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83887709016?pwd=MzITTi9OQidRWjQ5RHFIYTBYN3hGQT09>  
Password: 702485

**One Tap Mobile:** +16694449171,,83887709016#

**Dial In:** +1 669 900 9128

**Webinar ID:** 838 8770 9016

**Password:** 702485

***This will provide listening access and ability to address the  
Public Safety Committee when called upon.***

**IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO CONNECT VIA DIAL IN OPTION, PLEASE CALL 760-346-1127.**

Public comment is encouraged to be emailed to the Public Safety Committee meeting prior to the meeting at [cvag@cvag.org](mailto:cvag@cvag.org) by 5:00 p.m. on the day prior to the committee meeting. Comments intended to be read aloud should be no more than 300 characters.

**THIS MEETING IS HANDICAPPED ACCESSIBLE.  
ACTION MAY RESULT ON ANY ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA.**

**UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED, ALL ACTION ITEMS WILL BE PRESENTED TO THE  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE FOR FINAL APPROVAL.**

1. **CALL TO ORDER** – Chair Waymond Fermon, Councilmember, City of Indio

2. **ROLL CALL**

A. **Member Roster**

**P4**

3. **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

A. **Moment of Silence**

4. **PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS**

This is the time and place for members of the public to address the Public Safety Committee on agenda items. At the discretion of the Chair, comments may be taken at the time items are presented. Please limit comments to three (3) minutes.

5. **CHAIR /COMMITTEE MEMBER/CVAG STAFF COMMENTS**

6. **EX-OFFICIO UPDATES**

7. **CONSENT CALENDAR**

A. **Approve the November 14, 2022 Public Safety Committee Meeting Minutes**

**P5**

8. **DISCUSSION/ ACTION**

A. **Update on the Looming Closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison –**  
Presentation by California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation

**P9**

**Recommendation:** Receive a presentation from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and amend CVAG's 2023 State and Federal Legislative Platform to include opposition to the planned closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison

B. **Riverside County's Coordinated Response to Asylum Seekers –**  
Jeff Van Wagenen, Riverside County's County Executive Officer

**P13**

**Recommendation:** Information

C. **Roundtable Discussion of Coachella Valley Crime Trends – Erica Felci**

**P14**

**Recommendation:** Information

9. **INFORMATION**

A. **Attendance Record**

P22

10. **PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS**

This is the time and place for members of the public to address the Public Safety Committee on items of general interest within the purview of this committee. Please limit comments to two (2) minutes.

11. **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Upcoming Meetings:

The next meeting of the **Public Safety Committee** will be held on Monday, May 8, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. with additional meeting logistics to be announced.

The next meeting of the **Executive Committee** will be held on Monday, February 27, 2023, at 4:30 p.m. via Zoom webinar.

12. **ADJOURNMENT**

**Item 2A**

Coachella Valley Association of Governments  
Public Safety Committee  
Member Roster  
2022-2023



Voting Members	
Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians	Councilmember John Preckwinkle III
City of Blythe	Councilmember Johnny Rodriguez
City of Cathedral City	Councilmember Raymond Gregory – <b>VICE CHAIR</b>
City of Coachella	Councilmember Frank Figueroa
City of Desert Hot Springs	Mayor Pro Tem Roger Nuñez
City of Indian Wells	Councilmember Dana Reed
City of Indio	Councilmember Waymond Fermon - <b>CHAIR</b>
City of La Quinta	Councilmember John Pena
City of Palm Desert	Mayor Pro Tem Karina Quintanilla
City of Palm Springs	Mayor Grace Garner
City of Rancho Mirage	Councilmember Meg Marker
County of Riverside	Supervisor V. Manuel Perez
Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians	Councilmember Desiree Franco
Ex-Officio Members	
Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians	Robert Bradbury, Emergency Services Manager
California Highway Patrol	Dennis Woodbury, Commander
Cathedral City Fire	Michael Contreras, Fire Chief
Cathedral City Police	George Crum, Chief of Police
Desert Hot Springs Police	Jim Henson, Chief of Police
District Attorney's Office	Michael Hestrin, District Attorney
Indio Police	Mike Washburn, Chief of Police
Palm Desert Sheriff Station	Dean Agnoletto, Captain
Palm Springs Fire	Jason Loya, Acting Chief
Palm Springs Police	Andrew Mills, Chief of Police
Riverside County Fire Department	Robert Fish, Deputy Chief
Riverside County Probation Department	Ron Miller, Chief Probation Officer
Riverside County Sheriff's Department	Sheriff Chad Bianco
Thermal Sheriff Station	Michael Bianco, Captain
U.S. Border Patrol	David Kim

## ITEM 7A

### Public Safety Committee Meeting Minutes November 14, 2022



The audio file for this meeting can be found at: <http://www.cvag.org/audio.htm>

1. **CALL TO ORDER** - The meeting was called to order by Chair Waymond Fermon, City of Indio, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom videoconference, pursuant to AB 361 and the guidelines for virtual meetings.
2. **ROLL CALL** - Roll call was taken and it was determined that a quorum was not present for the start of the meeting. A quorum was established during Item 5.

#### **Members Present**

Aqua Caliente Band of  
Cahuilla Indians  
City of Cathedral City  
City of Indio  
City of La Quinta  
City of Palm Desert  
City of Palm Springs  
City of Rancho Mirage  
County of Riverside

Councilmember John Preckwinkle III *(Arrived at Item 8B)*  
Councilmember Raymond Gregory, *Vice Chair*  
Mayor Waymond Fermon, *Chair*  
Councilmember John Peña  
Councilmember Karina Quintanilla  
Mayor Pro Tem Grace Garner *(Arrived at Item 5)*  
Councilmember Iris Smotrich  
Juan Perez, County COO

#### **Ex-Officio Members Present**

Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians  
California Highway Patrol  
Cathedral City Fire  
Cathedral City Police  
Desert Hot Springs Police  
City of Palm Springs Fire  
Riverside County Probation

Robert Bradbury, Emergency Services Manager  
Commander Dennis Woodbury  
Chief Michael Contreras  
Chief George Crum  
Chief Jim Henson  
Acting Fire Chief Jason Loya  
Cristina Castro & Crystal Nieto

#### **Members & Ex-Officios Not Present**

City of Blythe  
City of Coachella  
City of Desert Hot Springs  
City of Indian Wells  
District Attorney's Office  
City of Indio Police  
City of Palm Springs Police  
Riverside County Sheriff  
Palm Desert Sheriff's Substation  
Thermal Sheriff Station  
Riverside County Fire  
U.S. Customs and Border Patrol

Councilmember Johnny Rodriguez  
Councilmember Megan Beaman-Jacinto  
Councilmember Roger Nuñez  
Councilmember Greg Sanders  
Michael Hestrin  
Chief Mike Washburn  
Chief Andrew Mills  
Sheriff Chad Bianco  
Captain Dean Agnoletto  
Captain Michael Bianco  
Deputy Chief Robert Fish  
Assistant Chief Patrol Agent David Kim

### **3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Vice Chair Raymond Gregory led the Public Safety Committee in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **4. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON AGENDA ITEMS**

None.

### **5. CHAIR / COMMITTEE MEMBER/CVAG STAFF COMMENTS**

Vice Chair Gregory announced the City of Cathedral City had sworn in new Fire Chief, Michael Contreras, who would address the Committee during Ex Officio comments.

Chair Fermon recognized the recent Veterans Day, acknowledging both veterans and elected officials who celebrated their service. He noted two upcoming Blue Light ceremonies: one on December 12 in the City of Riverside and one on November 18 in the City of Indio. He also noted community challenges with ghost guns, “smash and grab robberies” as well as street racings, including the connections to illegal substance abuse, and asked that additional education and information be provided the Committee at a future meeting.

### **6. EX-OFFICIO COMMENTS**

Chief Contreras made introductory remarks.

Prior to continuing on with Ex Officio comments, Councilmembers Iris Smotrich and Karina Quintanilla both echoed the need for additional information and discussion on street racing issues.

California Highway Patrol Commander Dennis Woodbury noted the CHP’s retail crime task force, highlighted some of the CHP’s work on street racing and reminded people that if they “see something, say something” to report potential crimes.

Councilmember John Peña acknowledged that, because she was concluding her term on Council, this was Councilmember Smotrich’s last meeting. Councilmember Smotrich, the Committee’s prior Chair, provided some departing remarks.

### **7. CONSENT CALENDAR**

#### **A. Approve the September 12, 2022 Public Safety Committee Meeting Minutes**

**IT WAS MOVED BY COUNCILMEMBER GREGORY AND SECONDED BY COUNCILMEMBER PEÑA TO APPROVE THE CONSENT CALENDAR.**

**THE MOTION CARRIED WITH 8 AYES AND 5 MEMBERS ABSENT.**

<b>Councilmember John Preckwinkle</b>	<b>ABSENT</b>
<b>Councilmember Johnny Rodriguez</b>	<b>ABSENT</b>
<b>Councilmember Raymond Gregory</b>	<b>AYE</b>
<b>Councilmember Megan Beaman Jacinto</b>	<b>ABSENT</b>
<b>Councilmember Roger Nuñez</b>	<b>ABSENT</b>
<b>Councilmember Greg Sanders</b>	<b>ABSENT</b>

Mayor Waymond Fermon	AYE
Councilmember John Peña	AYE
Councilmember Karina Quintanilla	AYE
Mayor Pro Tem Grace Garner	AYE
Councilmember Iris Smotrich	AYE
COO Juan Perez	AYE

## 8. DISCUSSION / ACTION

### A. Presentation: Community Education Efforts by the Coachella Valley Disaster Preparedness Network – Board President Carla Sullivan-Dilley

Board President Carla Sullivan-Dilley provided an overview of the Coachella Valley Disaster Preparedness Network, including its work as a nonprofit and its community partnerships.

No action was taken as this was an information item.

### B. Public Safety Concerns Related to Mylar Balloons – Erica Felci

Assistant Executive Director Erica Felci provided the staff report and introduced Antonio Ortega Imperial Irrigation District's Government Affairs and Communications Officer, who provided additional background.

Member discussion ensued. Members acknowledged the state's efforts to move toward a ban and, through discussion, came to the consensus that CVAG should monitor efforts and that Committee members could bring up potential Mylar limits or bans at the local level.

No action was taken as this was an information item.

### C. Federal and State Legislative Advocacy in 2023 – Emmanuel Martinez

Senior Programs Manager Emmanuel Martinez provided the staff report. Member discussion ensued. County COO Juan Perez noted Riverside County's significant shortage of judges and asked the Committee to add advocacy for more judicial positions and courtrooms as part of the legislative platform.

Members concurred with the position on judges, but no formal action was taken. Staff indicated additional feedback could be provided prior to the Executive Committee's December meeting.

## 9. INFORMATION – The following items were provided for information only:

- A. Attendance Record
- B. SB 535 and California Climate Investments - Tribal Designation
- C. Launch of Countywide "Faces of Fentanyl" Campaign

## 10. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

None.

## 11. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Upcoming Meetings:

The next meeting of the **Public Safety Committee** will be held on Monday, January 9, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. via Zoom webinar.

The next meeting of the **Executive Committee** will be held on Monday, December 5, 2022, at 4:30 p.m. via Zoom webinar.

## 12. ADJOURN

Prior to the adjournment, Chair Fermon again recognized Councilmember Smotrich, who detailed her work with veterans organizations such as Angel Force USA. Chair Fermon also extended holiday greetings to members and adjourned the meeting at 10:01 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Erica Felci*, Assistant Executive Director



## **ITEM 8A**

### **Coachella Valley Association of Governments Public Safety Committee February 13, 2023**



#### **STAFF REPORT**

**Subject:** Update on the Looming Closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison

**Contact:** Erica Felci, Assistant Executive Director ([efelci@cvag.org](mailto:efelci@cvag.org))

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**Recommendation:** Receive a presentation from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and amend CVAG's 2023 State and Federal Legislative Platform to include opposition to the planned closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison

**Background:** In December 2022, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) announced it was starting the process to close Chuckawalla Valley State Prison in the City of Blythe, with an anticipated closure in March 2025. The decision coincides with a plan to end its lease at the California City Correctional Facility in Kern County.

Chuckawalla Valley State Prison, which opened in 1988, occupies about 125 acres and is adjacent to Ironwood State Prison. Chuckawalla was designed to house for 1,738 inmates but had 2,733 inmates as of 2019, which were the most recent statistics presented on the CDCR website. Chuckawalla includes four Level II Non-Designated Programming Facility Yards and one Level I Non-Designated Programming Facility Yard. The prison also maintains operation of a fire house, water treatment plant, waste water treatment plant, the vehicle maintenance garage, and a recycling and salvage program.

In announcing the prison closure (news release attached), state officials said the decision was part of the 2022-23 budget and that Chuckwalla was chosen after an analyzing "several factors including cost to operate, impact of closure on the surrounding communities and the workforce; housing needs for all populations; long-term investments in state-owned and operated correctional facilities; public safety and rehabilitation; and durability of the state's solution to prison overcrowding."

The CDCR statement also noted that "the Administration plans to work directly with community stakeholders in Riverside County to help support workers and foster a bottom-up economic resilience plan for the community impacted by the closure." Additionally, the state pledged to minimize the impact to staff and the communities, including identifying opportunities for employee transfers. Inmates will be rehoused at appropriate level prisons.

Representatives from the CDCR, including Prison Closure Manager Charles "Chuck" Callahan, will attend the February meeting of the CVAG Public Safety Committee to provide an update of the plans. Following the presentation, CVAG staff is recommending the Public Safety Committee consider a request from the City of Blythe to actively oppose the decision.

Blythe city officials have expressed strong concerns about the economic impacts that will result from the closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison, not just in terms of job loss but also on the positive impact the prison has in maintaining facilities for the city. The Blythe City Council in January 2023 authorized contracts with both a lobbying firm and a public relations firm to address the planned closure. CVAG also has a state lobbying firm on contract, which is Sacramento-based Politico Group. However, CVAG's 2023 State and Federal Legislative Platform was adopted by the Executive Committee on December 5, 2022, just a day before the closure was announced. Amending the platform would provide the CVAG Chair and Executive Director authority to support Blythe's efforts to oppose the closure.

**Fiscal Analysis:** There is no cost to CVAG for this update. If the Committee supports an amendment to the 2023 State and Federal Legislative Platform, advocacy efforts would be covered under the existing contract with Politico Group and staff time.

**Attachment:** Announcement from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation on the Planned Closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison, December 6, 2022

# California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Announces the Planned Closure of Chuckawalla Valley State Prison

DECEMBER 6, 2022

*State will support local community and workforce with an economic resiliency plan and workers will be offered transfers to nearby facilities*

SACRAMENTO — As outlined in the 2022-23 budget with an eye toward fiscal responsibility, CDCR is moving forward with closing one prison and ceasing operation of another leased facility as a state prison, and will deactivate some facilities within six prisons.

CDCR and the Administration are working to minimize impact to staff and the communities. CDCR will work to limit the impact to employees affected by these closures and deactivations. This will include options to transfer both within and outside of impacted counties, and identification of employees for redirection to neighboring prisons where there are existing identified vacancies.

The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) will begin the process to close Chuckawalla Valley State Prison (CVSP) in Blythe, with an anticipated closure in March 2025. Similar to the recent announcement by the Administration (<https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.labor.ca.gov%2F2022%2F12%2F01%2Fcalifornia-supports-workers-and-fosters-bottom-up-economic-resilience-in-lassen-county%2F&data=05%7C01%7Cvicky.waters%40cdcr.ca.gov%7Ce31cbe249e8b40954ef808dad7aa8005%7C0662477dfa0c4556a8f5c3bc62aa0d9c%7C0%7C0%7C638059424541538766%7CUnknown%7CTWFPbGZsb3d8eyJWljoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQljoiv2luMzliLCJBTil6lk1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=FK3xQ2B34W65QcoPP%2F8Jo%2FBPgr8C1bXTuEQ2DTI8H6w%3D&reserved=0>) for workers impacted by the pending closure of the California Correctional Center in Lassen County, the Administration plans to work directly with community stakeholders in Riverside County to help support workers and foster a bottom-up economic resilience plan for the community impacted by the closure of CVSP.

Additionally, the department will exit the \$32 million, annual lease with CoreCivic for California City Correctional Facility, terminating the contract in March 2024, effectively ending the use of that facility as a state prison.

The department is also planning the deactivation of certain facilities in six prisons, including: Folsom Women's Facility; Facility C in Pelican Bay State Prison; West Facility in California Men's Colony; Facility A in California Rehabilitation Center; Facility D in California Institution for Men; and Facility D in California Correctional Institution. Should a significant need for capacity arise in the future due to a natural disaster or other serious need, this option gives the State the possibility to re-activate these facilities at a later date.

Incarcerated people at these locations will be rehoused into appropriate level prisons.

The two prisons were chosen pursuant to criteria set forth by the Legislature in Penal Code Section 2067. CDCR's leadership carefully evaluated the options for prison closures, pursuant to the 2022-23 budget and Penal Code requirements, and took into account several factors including cost to operate, impact of closure on the surrounding communities and the workforce; housing needs for all populations; long-term investments in state-owned and operated correctional facilities; public safety and rehabilitation; and durability of the state's solution to prison overcrowding.

California City Correctional Facility is the last contract facility in CDCR. It is a leased facility with our CoreCivic partners since 2013, and was necessary to help address overcrowding in state prisons. Now that the term of the lease is expiring and there is additional space at nearby facilities, it makes sense to transition our staff and population into our state-owned facilities.

The Department will also engage with impacted employees in the coming months and years, providing employees with State Restrictions of Appointment (SROA)/Surplus status, which affords them hiring preference for their impacted classifications as well as all other classifications for which they may have lateral transfer options throughout the state as well as for all state agencies. These efforts have been successful in prior closures and are subject to labor negotiation. Incarcerated people in the impacted prisons and facilities will be transferred to other institutions or yards based on their housing, custody and rehabilitative needs. All of their rehabilitative, educational and self-help program credits will transfer with them.

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**ITEM 8B**

**Coachella Valley Association of Governments  
Public Safety Committee  
February 13, 2023**



**STAFF REPORT**

**Subject:**        **Riverside County's Coordinated Response to Asylum Seekers**

**Contact:**       Erica Felci, Assistant Executive Director ([efelci@cvag.org](mailto:efelci@cvag.org))

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**Recommendation: Information**

**Background:** Title 42 is a public health order issued by President Trump's administration that allows Customs and Border Protection to expel migrants to Mexico or back to their home countries to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in holding facilities. The order was extended multiple times. Amid the improving health conditions, President Biden has announced the COVID-19 health emergency will end in May 2023, which is expected to end the policy. The decision has been challenged, as a number of states have argued that their states' healthcare, law enforcement and education systems would be overly burdened by an influx of undocumented immigrants if the public health restriction is lifted. To date, the legal rulings have kept Title 42 in place.

As previously reported to CVAG's Public Safety Committee, the Riverside County Asylum Seeker Response Program was launched in March 2021 to support the U.S. Customs and Border Protection response to asylum seekers entering the county. The response includes ensuring that asylum seekers who are released by Border Patrol, and legally seeking asylum in the United States, receive short-term transitional services. It also included testing and sheltering needed to address the COVID-19 pandemic. The County has included funding for the Galilee Center, an eastern Coachella Valley-based nonprofit organization that fulfills the food, clothing and basic needs for local disadvantaged children, families, and farmworkers. The Asylum Seeker Response Program has engaged an array of other County departments – including public health, behavioral health, public social services and Riverside County Probation Department – to address the various social services needed, including mass care and shelter coordination, meal operations, travel assistance and other wraparound services.

By the end of January 2023, Riverside County officials said they have received more than 66,000 individuals. The typical assistance includes helping them with a stay in the county – generally a couple of days before they head to a sponsor outside of the county. The County is contracting for more than 300 motel rooms to address the need. The County is also coordinating a contingency plan should there be an increased number of individuals, including coordinating cities across the county.

Jeff Van Wagenen, Riverside County's County Executive Officer, will provide an update on the response at the February 13 meeting of the Public Safety Committee.

**Fiscal Analysis:** There is no cost to CVAG for this informational update.

**ITEM 8C**

**Coachella Valley Association of Governments  
Public Safety Committee  
February 13, 2023**



**STAFF REPORT**

**Subject:** Roundtable Discussion of Coachella Valley Crime Trends

**Contact:** Erica Felci, Assistant Executive Director ([efelci@cvag.org](mailto:efelci@cvag.org))

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**Recommendation: Information**

**Background:** The Public Safety Committee has previously expressed interest in receiving updates on FBI reports as they pertain to Coachella Valley trends. In January 2023, The Desert Sun published an analysis of the crime data that law enforcement agency report on a monthly basis to the California Department of Justice. Ultimately, the information will be compiled for the FBI's Uniform Crime Report Program. The Desert Sun's analysis reflected data from 2010 through September 2022. The newspaper stated that *"Serious crimes overall were down last year in most of the Coachella Valley, preliminary reports show, but there were more homicides than there had been in at least a decade."*

The Desert Sun's overview is attached, and its full report can be found here: [bit.ly/ValleyCrimeStats](https://bit.ly/ValleyCrimeStats).

Several local police chiefs – including Desert Ho Springs Police Chief Jim Henson, Indio Police Chief Mike Washburn and Palm Springs Police Chief Andrew Mills – along with other top law enforcement will be at the February meeting of the Public Safety Committee to provide their analysis and discuss any changes planned to address the trends.

**Fiscal Analysis:** There is no cost to CVAG for this update.

**Attachment:** Desert Sun analysis of crime trends in the Coachella Valley, January 14, 2023

# Desert Sun.

## CRIME & COURTS

# Some crimes drop, but homicides in Coachella Valley jump in 2022. Here's what police say

*Police in the valley investigated 37 deaths as homicides in 2022, up from 31 in 2021.*



**Christopher Damien**

Palm Springs Desert Sun

Published 9:20 a.m. PT Jan. 14, 2023 | Updated 2:48 p.m. PT Jan. 14, 2023

## Key Points

Coachella had 11 killings, the most of any city. Desert Hot Springs recorded 7. Palm Springs had 5.

Assaults and burglaries declined, but auto thefts remain a problem.

*Editor's note: The Desert Sun is publishing 2022 crime statistics for every city in the Coachella Valley. To see them all, go to [bit.ly/ValleyCrimeStats](https://bit.ly/ValleyCrimeStats).*

Serious crimes overall were down last year in most of the Coachella Valley, preliminary reports show, but there were more homicides than there had been in at least a decade.

Like many areas around the nation, the region had seen a rise in violent crime in recent years. The valley's nine cities reported a decade-high 32 homicides in 2019, followed by 30 in 2020 and 31 in 2021. Statistics from law-enforcement agencies, which The Desert Sun verified when possible with the departments, show that trend has accelerated.

Police in the valley investigated 37 deaths as homicides in 2022, though that number could change as investigations continue.

The Desert Sun excluded from that tally fatal traffic collisions that resulted in criminal charges of manslaughter alone, but one crash in Desert Hot Springs that was investigated as a murder is included.

Each law enforcement agency reports crime data monthly to the California Department of Justice for the FBI's Uniform Crime Report Program. The Desert Sun collected and analyzed these reports from every city in the Coachella Valley from 2010 through September 2022, the most recent month in which numbers are available from every city. The police departments won't submit the formal numbers until later in 2023.

The Desert Sun also used available crime reports and an unofficial database of such events kept by the paper to analyze homicides, robberies, aggravated assaults, burglaries and vehicle thefts throughout the region. Records were gathered from Cathedral City, Desert Hot Springs, Indio and Palm Springs, which have their own police departments. Records for Coachella, Indian Wells, La Quinta, Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage were collected from the Riverside County Sheriff's Department, which provides police services for those cities.

## **'Ghost guns' and prevention**

Police chiefs, elected officials and other law enforcement leaders in many cities discussed what they think is behind the rise in homicides — and what they're doing about it.

Desert Hot Springs finished the year with seven homicides, one more than the year before. Deputy Chief Steven Shaw said that in recent years, the department has seen an increase in seizures of illegal firearms that do not have serial numbers, sometimes referred to as ghost guns. Shootings account for the majority of the homicides in the region.

"Officers are recovering a lot of guns off the street, and most are ghost guns," Shaw said. "A good portion are from folks who have prior records who aren't legally permitted to have firearms."

Coachella ended the year with 11 homicides, the most that city has reported any year since before 2010. The sheriff's department did not respond to inquiries to verify this count.

In an interview, Coachella Mayor Steven Hernandez said the violence has been "very concerning" and expressed his condolences to those who have lost loved ones. He said he was aware of nine of the cases being solved.

"We take this very seriously and provide the resources necessary for justice to be served," he said.

He echoed previous statements he made to The Desert Sun in November, saying the city has considered increasing the number of deputies patrolling. Because several of the victims were



young, including two juveniles, Hernandez said continuing to invest in resources and programs aimed at youth could also help.

"For us, it's really about prevention and intervention, really trying to look at: Are there trends that are festering that we need to address?" Hernandez said. "We need to work on community policing. Perhaps we've really got to think about our social connections, churches, organizations, groups that can help people and guide them through what they're going through. Hopefully, we can continue to create more community love with one another."

Coachella Councilmember Neftali Galarza similarly said the city has focused on providing more opportunities for its youth. He mentioned that the city has arranged for office space to be leased to nonprofits cheaply, providing an opportunity to partner with them to help address related issues.

"Public safety is a number one concern to our residents, and the biggest budget line is policing and public safety," Galarza said. "What is the right solution to solve this? I think it's complicated for public officials and public administrators. I like to believe in more investment in the community, further investment in parks and recreation for youth. We've done a good job of going after grants for these projects."

Coachella is among the valley's cities that contract for police services from the sheriff's department. The department's rising costs have been a topic of debate in recent elections. Galarza said the city is continuing to research creating its own police department, which he and other councilmembers believe could keep the cost of policing down in the long run and provide the community with more control of how it is protected.

La Quinta, another contract city, also saw a rise in homicides, with two in 2022. The two killings are the second most in the last decade behind a five-homicide spike in 2019. Sheriff's Lt. Andy Martinez, who helps coordinate the deputies patrolling La Quinta, noted both suspects were family members of the victims.

"They were relatives of each other, so (those homicides) were not gang-related in any way, or we don't have a serial murderer out running the streets," Martinez told The Desert Sun.

La Quinta also reported the same number of aggravated assaults, 44, through November 2022 that it did in all of 2021. Martinez said aggravated assault statistics typically include domestic violence cases, which make up a "significant portion" of assaults reported in La Quinta.

Cathedral City Police Chief George Crum said he focused resources in 2022 on gang suppression, and as in other cities, he noted a rise in the number of guns seized. That city reported two homicides in 2022, one fewer than the year before.

"If you have some sustained teams focusing on the root problems in our individual cities, you can see some success," Crum said. "The high visibility of patrol officers in areas where we know we see higher numbers of certain crimes, interacting with the communities in those areas, that's a deterrent. When we have a decent, trusting relationship, that helps us solve crimes."

Palm Springs Police Chief Andrew Mills said his department was faced with a concerning string of violent crimes early in 2022, which he focused resources on. The city reported five homicides in 2022, two fewer than the year before.

"We had a lot of gun violence in the first part of the year, 101 felony arrests," Mills said Tuesday. "We took a couple dozen guns off the street. When you take guns off the street, out of the hands of people who shouldn't have them, that makes an impact."

## **Behind the drops in crime**

Throughout the Coachella Valley, aggravated assaults are generally down, with most cities seeing drops from 2021 to 2022.

Indio's 225 assaults in all of 2022, for example, were down more than a third from the prior year's 341. And its reported seven homicides were one fewer than in 2021. Next door in Coachella, even as homicides increased, there were 82 assaults through September, some 30% less than the 130 in all of 2021.

Indio Police Chief Mike Washburn was cautious to credit the improvements in his city to any one effort by the department, except for the hard work of his staff. He noted during an interview Thursday that the department has increased the number of uniformed officers, including motorcycle officers, and code enforcement, while continuing to focus on the need to hire.

"We don't know what we prevent by being visible, but we know it works," Washburn said, noting numbers in almost every crime category are trending down. "We had a concerted effort to bring on more officers, even on overtime, to make sure that we've had the right number that we need on the street. I think it's an increase in visibility."

Burglaries were down in nearly every city, with substantial drops in two. While Palm Springs reported 515 burglaries in 2021, it saw 394 in 2022, according to statistics provided by the department. Palm Desert burglaries similarly dropped from 365 in 2021, to 142 last year.

Mills said the department has stressed the community can be more vigilant about reducing the opportunities for property crimes, such as by not leaving valuables in plain sight and unsecured.

"We arrested a few people who may have had a disproportionate impact, but in many ways the community can protect themselves," Mills said. "We're not going to successfully reduce crime unless we get rid of the opportunity."

Desert Hot Springs reported about 80 burglaries through September 2022, less than half what it has averaged in years prior. Shaw similarly said the department found most of these cases were crimes of opportunity repeated by the same perpetrators. Early in the year, he said, there was a string of home burglaries that officers tied to a group of juveniles.

"We got a call while one was going on, and we had figured out from the previous cases where their getaway route was," Shaw said. "And, sure enough, we got them as they were attempting to flee. It was just good work by the officers at the time."

Coachella reported 65 burglaries in 2021 and 70 through September. But as in the other cities, its rate of burglaries when controlled for population is well down from what it was a decade ago.

In 2010, Palm Springs experienced about 14 burglaries for every 1,000 residents. In 2022, preliminary data shows the rate is nearly half, closer to 7.3. In 2010, Palm Desert experienced about 13 burglaries for every 1,000 residents and now about four. Coachella experienced about 14 burglaries for 1,000 residents in 2010, and, even with a slight rise in 2022, the rate is around two.

Robberies were down or remained at 2021 levels in most of the nine cities, except a marginal rise in La Quinta and a jump in Rancho Mirage from two in 2021 to eight through September of 2022. In Cathedral City, statistics include a spike in robberies, which reports show reflects a different reporting method rather than a major increase in the crime.

Indio saw a significant drop in robberies, from 77 in 2021 to 31 through September. So did Palm Desert, which reported 33 in 2021, and a mere six through September of last year.

"We're enormous believers in community policing," said Indio's chief, Washburn. "An engaged community is a lot more than our eyes and ears. They problem solve for you."

## **Auto thefts a stubborn problem**

Most cities are projecting auto thefts in 2022 that are just slightly lower than the year before. However, Coachella, Desert Hot Springs and Cathedral City are on track to be above the average for the prior few years.

Palm Springs, for example, reported 440 auto thefts in 2021 and 317 through September. Rancho Mirage reported 97 in 2021 and 91 through September. Both are on pace to be slightly below the year prior once final numbers are reported. Indian Wells could have half the year prior's number, with 17 in 2021 and six through September.

Shaw said auto thefts have been a stubbornly persistent regional problem, but added that most vehicles are recovered in the area.

"The vast majority of the cars are being stolen and found in the Coachella Valley," Shaw said. "They take it to get from point A to point B. A lot of times it's older cars that are easy to steal or keys being left in cars."

The Cathedral City chief, Crum, said he was surprised to see certain property crimes falling last year, given that cost of living and inflation has gone up notably, which over his three decades in policing usually correlates with a rise in such offenses.

"We're costing people out of the life they may have lived prior to the pandemic," Crum said. "As people struggle financially, we, as law enforcement officers, should expect a rise in crime as a consequence."

## **Perception: 'What we're seeing is a swelling insecurity'**

Several police and elected officials said residents' reactions to the ups and downs in crime trends have been amplified recently by how quickly information, and sometimes misinformation, is shared. They said constituents often express a belief about crime that might not reflect the actual statistics.

"You can't fight an emotional argument with data," said Mills, the chief in Palm Springs. "Regardless of what the crime data shows, for many people it's their perception that counts, and what we're seeing is a swelling insecurity."

Washburn similarly noted that he speaks with Indio residents about their perceptions of high rates of crimes that aren't backed up by the data the police department has.

"I urge people to report crime if they observe it so we have accurate data," he said. "But also don't get panicked. Tell us about your concerns, and we can provide more information about what we know is going on."

Crum said community engagement is a primary focus for Cathedral City police in 2023. He noted the pandemic made it very difficult to maintain good communication with residents during a pivotal moment in American policing, after murder of George Floyd in Minnesota in May 2020.

"I think that when you go back to May 2020, and the impact Minneapolis had on American policing, it's imperative that we stay connected," Crum said. "We have to address where our profession needs to be transformed to meet the communities we police."

Mills said that during his previous career with the San Diego Police Department, he worked events at the city's stadium, formerly the home of an NFL team. He said his department would make "hundreds of arrests in a two-hour period during some of those events."

"We had about 100,000 people at Pride this last year, and we had zero arrests related to it," Mills said. "People chose to be civil and to be kind to one another. We were safe because people chose to be safe."

Hernandez of Coachella similarly said he believes his city is headed in the right direction, even as homicides have risen, stating crime is generally down from the highs the city experienced in years past.

"We're coming out of a life-changing pandemic and, in many ways, people are disconnected; they're figuring out how to be a community again," Hernandez said.

And several people interviewed echoed that leadership through the transition will be key.

"From Washington, D.C., to local cities, it's really important how we talk to one another," Mills said. "I think you see the numbers tend to drop when the tension is lessened in a community. We in government can help set the level of civility."

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
*The Desert Sun reporter Tom Coulter contributed to this report.*

**Item 9A**

COACHELLA VALLEY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS  
PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE  
ATTENDANCE RECORD  
FY2022-2023

Voting Members	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	ATTENDED		
Aqua Caliente		●	●		●								3	out of	3
City of Blythe		○	○		○								0	out of	3
City of Cathedral City		●	●		●								3	out of	3
City of Coachella		○	○		○								0	out of	3
City of Desert Hot Springs		●	○		○								1	out of	3
City of Indian Wells		●	●		○								2	out of	2
City of Indio		●	●		●								3	out of	3
City of La Quinta		●	●		●								3	out of	3
City of Palm Desert		●	●		●								3	out of	3
City of Palm Springs		○	●		●								2	out of	3
City of Rancho Mirage		●	●		●								3	out of	3
Riverside County		●	●		●								3	out of	3
Total Attendance Per Meeting		9	9		8										

Ex Officio / Non-Voting Members	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	ATTENDED		
Agua Caliente		●	●		●								3	out of	3
California Highway Patrol		●	●		●								3	out of	3
Cathedral City Fire		●	○		●								2	out of	3
Cathedral City Police		●	●		●								3	out of	3
County Probation Department		●	●		●								3	out of	3
Desert Hot Springs Police		○	●		●								2	out of	3
District Attorney's Office		○	○		○								0	out of	3
Indio Police		●	○		○								1	out of	3
Palm Desert Sheriff Station		●	●		○								2	out of	3
Palm Springs Fire		●	●		●								3	out of	3
Palm Springs Police		●	●		○								2	out of	3
Riverside County Fire		○	●		○								1	out of	3
Riverside County Sheriff		●	●		○								2	out of	3
Thermal Sheriff Station		○	○		○								0	out of	3
U.S. Border Patrol		○	○		○								0	out of	3
Total Attendance Per Meeting		10	10		7										

No Meeting   
 Vacant \*  
 Present ●  
 Absent ○