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Cops Clean House; Investigation focuses on former bosses of seven arrested officers

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The Chicago Police Department moved Tuesday to disband its Special Operations Section -- and a source disclosed that a probe of the troubled unit is focusing on some former bosses of the seven cops arrested in the corruption case.

The criminal investigation of the once-elite Special Operations Section "goes high" into the ranks, said a source close to the case, adding that more charges are expected.

One SOS supervisor welcomed the move to kill it.

"Change us, disband us, do something," said the supervisor, who refused to be quoted by name. "There are still a lot of good people there. I'm tired of saying that's where I work."

Members of the unit roamed the city making gun and drug arrests. Until about a year ago, they drove unmarked cars and wore plain clothes.

About 100 remaining officers -- the majority of whom are not part of the ongoing probe -- must apply for jobs in police districts or other units such as Targeted Response, which is adding a fifth platoon, police spokeswoman Monique Bond said.

Targeted Response officers work in crime "hot spots" designated by the department. They wear uniforms and drive marked cars equipped with GPS devices that track their whereabouts, Bond said.

Other units that were part of SOS -- such as SWAT, the Mounted Patrol, the Marine Unit and the Helicopter Unit -- will remain intact, officials say.

"There's no doubt these officers have saved lives, peacefully ended life-threatening standoffs and rescued drowning victims," interim Police Supt. Dana Starks said. "They will continue those tasks."

7 face corruption charges

The department also will boost the number of officers in the Internal Affairs Division, which investigates misconduct. IAD officers will increase their visits to districts to follow up with supervisors about complaints, Starks said.

Seven members of SOS, including a sergeant, face state corruption charges filed in 2006. They've been accused of home invasions, kidnappings and robberies.

Officer Jerome Finnigan, the alleged ringleader, was also charged in federal court last month with trying to hire someone to kill a former SOS officer. Finnigan knew the officer was serving as a government witness.

The Sun-Times reported Sunday that Finnigan is No. 3 in the department in the number of complaints of misconduct filed between 2001 and 2005. Finnigan, with 52 complaints, is on a list of 662 officers with 10 or more complaints over that period. Most of the complaints resulted in no action.

Four of the five top complaint-getters were in SOS. The city is fighting in court to keep the list secret, citing privacy concerns.

The decision to disband SOS echoes a move in 2000 to scrap the citywide Gang Crimes Unit. Gang Specialist Joseph Miedzianowski was convicted of running a Chicago-to-Miami drug business with the aid of gang members he protected, and is serving a life sentence.