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**117371**  
**117376**

# Contents

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## Features

117371

- 1 [ **Operation Pressure Point:  
An Urban Drug Enforcement Strategy**

By Patrick J. Carroll

117372

- 9 [ **A Guide for First Responders to Hostage Situations**

By John T. Dolan and G. Dwayne Fuselier

117374

- 16 [ **Hazards of Clandestine Drug Laboratories**

By Randolph D. James

117375

- 22 [ **The Use of Canines In Arson Detection**

By Robert B. Thomas, Jr.

117376

- 25 [ **The Admissibility of Evidence  
Located In Searches by Private Persons**

By Austin A. Andersen

## Departments

117373

- 8 **Focus**  
14 [ **Police Practices**  
32 **Wanted by the FBI**

U.S. Department of Justice  
National Institute of Justice

117373-  
117376

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# FBI

## Law Enforcement Bulletin

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**The Cover:** Federal and local law enforcement personnel work together to combat the urban drug epidemic. See article on page 1.

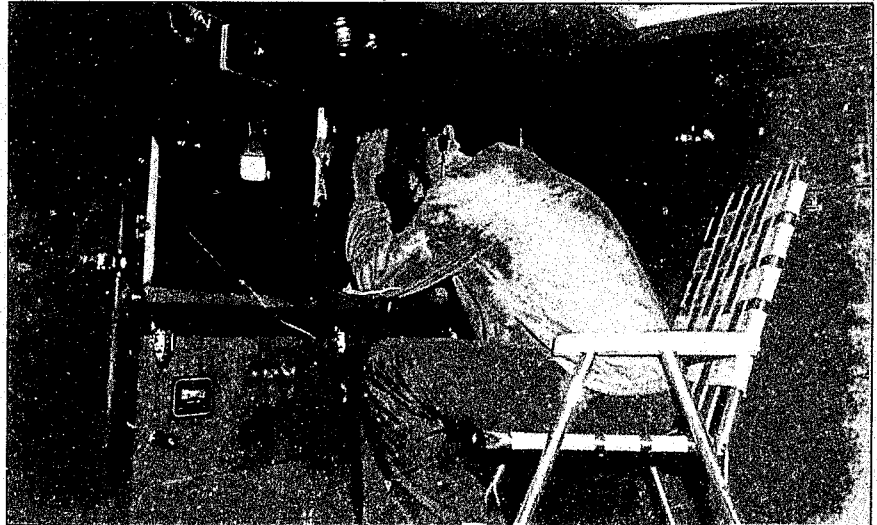
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## Police Practices

### Surveillance On A Shoestring

Surveillance is a vital investigative technique of any police department. Yet, many smaller agencies lack the necessary equipment that is available to their larger counterparts. This does not have to be the case, however, as proven by the Alcohol & Tobacco Enforcement Section of the Wisconsin Department of Revenue. Combining ingenuity, experience and automotive know-how, the department converted a van into an effective surveillance vehicle using a minimum amount of money.

The department chose to equip a van since one of its responsibilities is to seize contraband, which comes in all weights, shapes, and sizes. However, the type of vehicle to be converted depends significantly on how it will be used, and how it is acquired (purchase or seizure).



Based on the department's experiences, here are some features to consider.

When buying a van, pick a standard utility van in the most popular color available, one that everyone and his brother has. Besides, conversion-type vans

with custom paint schemes are not only expensive but also make the vehicle unique and easier to remember if spotted. Also, buy a van with windows on all sides and the rear that have the darkest tinted glass that is legal in your State.

Other desirable options are:

- Automatic transmission (not everyone can drive a clutch),
- Power steering/brakes (reduces city driving fatigue),
- Heaviest suspension available,
- Rear roof vent or a small exhaust fan,
- Cloth seats or seat covers,
- Air conditioning and heating,
- Cruise control (if highway travel is anticipated and you want to improve gas mileage),
- Heavy-duty alternator, battery, and cooling package,
- Rubber floor mats (reduces stains and is easier to clean),
- Sliding side door and double rear doors (allows for easier entry and exit),
- Standard radio (you can't afford to have the van broken into by a parts thief while you are conducting a surveillance).

Many companies convert vans for surveillance use and charge accordingly, which is fine if your agency can afford it. But, why pay someone when, in most cases, the job can be done in-house? Practically every department has someone who is a "jack of all trades," someone who is mechanically inclined and can do carpentry and low-voltage electrical work. Ask around your department; maybe two or three employees can work together to equip the surveillance vehicle you need.

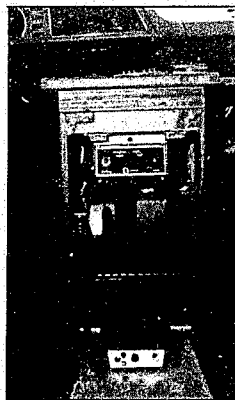
A complete instruction manual with step-by-step instructions has been written on the conversion of the van. Copies of this manual are available, upon request to:

Wisconsin Department of  
Revenue  
Excise Tax-Beverage and Cigarette Tax  
P.O. Box 8905  
Madison, WI 53791

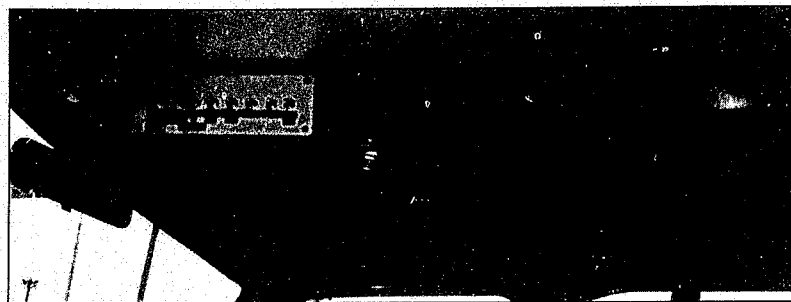
The following features were installed in the van equipped by the Alcohol & Enforcement Section:

- A hinged bulkhead extending across the vehicle's width to partition off the rear of the van to haul cargo or to seal the rear to make a small room.
- Three small consoles house the necessary equipment to conduct a surveillance, e.g., radios, various switches to operate the equipment, storage space for shotguns, etc.
- Side windows covered with plywood (painted black on the side facing the windows) with trap doors for looking out; a rear window reinforced with 1/2-inch hardware cloth and regular window screen to allow for ventilation while maintaining privacy.
- A second battery.
- A battery isolator, mechanical siren, P.A. speaker/electronic siren, and red lights disguised as radio speakers on the dash.
- Dead bolt locks on all exterior doors.

This basic vehicle costs about the same as a full-sized sedan equipped for use by most agencies. Except for the radio, P.A. system, and sirens, all of the above can be installed for less than \$500. The only other expense was the 200 working hours spent to finish the project.



Left: Radio console when closed and opened.  
Below: Overhead console with C.B. radio contains fictitiously labeled controls so that van appears commercially manufactured.



*(This feature was submitted by Special Agent Herbert W. Petersen, Investigative Unit, Alcohol and Tobacco Enforcement Section, Wisconsin Department of Revenue, Waukesha, WI)*

*Police Practices* serves as an information source for unique or noteworthy methods, techniques, or operations of law enforcement agencies. Submissions to this department of the magazine should be no more than 750 words (3 pages, double spaced

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