Chicagoland Chicago police expand offer of overtime to officers, according to memo
By Jeremy Gorner
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In the face of rising violence, Chicago police are expanding their offer for officers to work overtime on their days off to seven days a week throughout the summer, according to a department-issued memo obtained by the Tribune.

Veteran officers called the move unprecedented, and the union representing rank-and-file officers jumped on the change as confirmation that the department needs more officers on the street, as it has long contended.

"This is clearly an admission that we're in a manpower crunch, and the city is finally acknowledging that," said Michael Shields, the Fraternal Order of Police president.

Last month the department began to offer overtime five days a week — Thursday through Monday. The latest memo said the program was expanding to Tuesday and Wednesday.

"There will be one start time on Tuesdays and Wednesdays ... at 1600 hours (4 p.m.)," the message said.

But a spokeswoman for Superintendent Garry McCarthy insisted there were no plans to schedule overtime on those two days.

The department has declined to provide the number of officers tapped to work overtime on weekends or the cost of the citywide initiative since it was launched in mid-June.

The FOP said the department had hoped to put as many as 210 officers on overtime duty on Fridays and Saturdays and up to 160 officers on Thursdays, Sundays and Mondays.

Police sources said the officers are paid time-and-a-half for their overtime work.

The extra officers are believed to have been dispatched to patrol the Michigan Avenue shopping corridor, an area of downtown where a few unprovoked mob attacks drew wide publicity, and in violent neighborhoods on the South and West sides.

After winning praise for his handling of the police response during the NATO summit in May, McCarthy has been under increasing pressure because of the soaring violence. For the first half of 2012, homicides jumped about 39 percent over the year-earlier period, while shootings rose 9 percent.

Some aldermen have been calling for the department to reinstate the more aggressive police strike forces that McCarthy disbanded after taking office last year.

The FOP, which considers the overtime initiative a "Band-Aid approach," has said the department has hired only about 150 officers in the past two years, far fewer than the 1,000 it says retired over that time.
Since his appointment last year by Mayor Rahm Emanuel, McCarthy has contended that the department does not need additional officers and instead spoke of increasing efficiency.

Last week, though, he said 400 to 500 officers would be hired by the end of 2012 to offset the impact of retirements. It takes about six months of training before new officers are assigned full-time patrol duties.

But during the hot summer months when violence peaks, the department is relying on the overtime initiative to meet its manpower needs.

After the Tribune disclosed the initiative last month, Emanuel said the city would have enough money to pay for the overtime despite its budget woes.

Robert Lombardo, a criminology professor at Loyola University Chicago, said the department has offered overtime periodically over the years — at times to boost patrols of public housing complexes and CTA train lines, usually with federal money.

But he said he believes that expanding overtime to seven days a week is a clear admission by the department that there aren't enough officers on the streets.

"There have always been overtime programs, but not like this," said Lombardo, a former 20-year veteran of the department.