

Police fire blanks in park as part of a test

By John C. Drake, Globe Staff | October 4, 2007

A quiet night in the South End was disrupted by gunfire last evening, startling area residents, but pleasing Boston police who had fired blanks from Blackstone Park to test a new gunshot detection system.

The two-minute test about 9:30 p.m. was the first of six last night within a 6.2-mile area of Boston that has been blanketed with gunshot sensors, designed to alert police dispatchers in 10 seconds to the location of gunfire within 30 feet of its origin.



Boston police Superintendent Dan Linskey said that 91 sensors are in place and that last night's tests constituted the final step in calibrating the high-tech crime-fighting system before its full implementation.

"We're hoping to stop gunfights and people using guns in the city of Boston," Linskey said at Blackstone Park before the test. "We're hoping to do that by showing up on crime scenes in a timely fashion."

While the network remains in a testing phase, twice this week dispatchers training on the system detected actual gunfire and sent police to the scenes, Linskey said. Police recovered ballistics evidence in both cases, but no arrests were made as a result of the detection system, he said.

"We're getting there, and the system will only get better with time," Linskey said, adding that officials were on track to have a fully operational detection system by the middle of the month.

Implementation of the system has been plagued with delays since Mayor Thomas M. Menino pushed through an emergency \$1.5 million funding order in January. Negotiations with the Mountain View, Calif.-based contractor ShotSpotter forced implementation well past summer, when Menino had hoped to have it in place.

For last night's test in the South End, two police firearms instructors fired a dozen blanks from the cordoned-off park. A worker with ShotSpotter spoke by cellphone with co-workers in California analyzing the sounds.

Despite an extensive campaign to alert residents and businesses to the planned tests, many passersby seemed stunned by the sounds and sights of two men wielding rifles in the park.

"I heard the shots, and I thought it was like a drive-by shooting," said South End resident Sal Duale, 20, who walked from his apartment to see the commotion. Duale was hopeful the test would be effective in cutting down on crime.

"It's going to be good, if they're going to react quickly" to gunfire, he said.

Police also conducted tests at Walker Playground, Franklin Field, Horatio Harris Park and the intersections of Ruggles and Tremont streets, and Geneva Avenue and Bowdoin Street.

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