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R. Hertz

## Local cops brace for State Police cuts

By [Ken West](#)

Madison County Sheriff Robert Hertz said proposed layoffs in the Illinois State Police will probably force his deputies to pick up work normally done by troopers. The changes could spread resources thin for area police departments already rocked by budget issues.

"If the cuts are made, the bottom line is, accidents have to be worked. We have to enforce driving regulations, such as speeding and DUIs," Hertz said.

State Police officials are considering laying off about 500 workers across Illinois to reduce a budget shortfall. As many as 30 percent of troopers will be let go under the proposal, which still needs approval, said a spokesman, Master Sgt. Isaiah Vega. The changes would start in the fall.

Vega said the layoffs will almost certainly impact local departments, which may be forced

to pick up duties typically tackled by troopers. The State Police has extensive criminal investigation, forensic science and aviation divisions, along with patrolling state highways.

"These effects will be felt statewide," he said.

Hertz said he's already hearing people saying that reductions may mean fewer eyes checking for speeders - hardly the idea he wants to send. "That's frightening because what they are saying is they can drive as fast as they can," Hertz said.

He said the Sheriff's Department will look at ways to shift resources if the cuts happen. The changes may be significant: Madison County alone has about 300 miles of freeways, Hertz said.

Some of the work will likely fall to local police departments in high-traffic areas, such as Madison, where Interstate 55/70 cuts through a corner of St. Clair County.

But staffing is very tight, said Police Chief Steven Shelby. They laid off one officer in November and have just enough resources to cover city streets, not the busy interstate.

"We try to stick to the city," Shelby said. "We don't have any plans in place to change anything. If the Illinois State Police calls for assistance, we would help."

That's also true in Mascoutah, where Public Safety Director Bruce Fleshren said fewer State Police troopers will put the city in a tight spot. They don't have personnel to work an accident for hours on end.

"The people of Mascoutah are paying to have us patrol town," he reasoned.

Still, Hertz said some agencies have to step up if the State Police makes the cuts. The options are limited, he said.

"It's clear to me, the less police you have, the less law enforcement occurs and that has a negative effect," Hertz said.

Contact reporter [Ken West](#) at 618-344-0264, ext. 101

Possible State Police cuts

? 464 troopers laid off

? 100 retiring troopers

? 30 officers reassigned

Source: State Police