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## County sheriffs struggle with cuts

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Plummeting property values are forcing sheriff's offices in metro Detroit to downsize jails, lay off hundreds of deputies, corrections officers and investigators, and cut back on crime-stopping technology.

Macomb County Jail became the latest to do so Thursday when Sheriff Mark Hackel announced plans to close 200 beds in the jail this month.

Sheriff's offices are losing more funding than other departments because their budgets make up the largest share of county spending plans.

"It has been very challenging and difficult," Oakland County Sheriff Michael Bouchard said about cutting his budget by 20% by 2012. "We are forced to do a whole lot more with a whole lot less."

By the end of 2012, Bouchard expects his office will lose 120 deputies, sergeants and captains, jail space for hundreds of inmates and a helicopter that searches for criminals, kidnap victims and car thieves at a savings of \$20 million.

After losing about 85 deputies and space for more than 100 inmates last year, the Wayne County Sheriff's Office is bracing for deeper cuts because of demands to cut a whopping 20% from its budget. At stake are hundreds of deputies and more jail space.

The Aug. 15 closure of 200 jail cells in the Macomb County Jail is to save about \$4.5 million in an ongoing effort to erase the county's \$15.6-million deficit next year.

Hackel also plans to cut the positions of nine corrections officers this month. Budget reductions forced the sheriff last year to cut in half the number of deputies who patrol northern Macomb County.

"Our resources have been declining at a rapid pace, and it's going to get a lot worse," Hackel said.

The deficits stem from plummeting property values that are eroding county tax bases at alarmingly high rates.

The three counties expect to lose about 12% -- or a combined \$97 million -- in property taxes next year. A comparable loss is expected in 2011.

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