

# **Herman Goldstein Award Submission**

## **Motor Vehicle Theft Analysis And Reduction In Rockaway Township, New Jersey**

### **Summary:**

With the completion of one of the largest regional shopping malls in New Jersey, Rockaway Township experienced a steady escalation of motor vehicle thefts in and around that venue for many years. This illegal activity culminated in a vehicle theft being reported on the average of nearly one per day for each day the Mall was open. Additionally, public concerns about the overall safety of the mall parking lot grew, as fears of violent carjacking incidents increased as well. Press media accounts labeled the Rockaway Townsquare Mall parking lots as “a haven for auto thieves”.

### **SARA model application**

The nature of the problem manifested itself in an ever-increasing number of vehicle thefts occurring at a newly constructed regional shopping mall within Rockaway Township. The problem was generally identified through an increasing number of vehicle theft reports being taken by the district patrol units (note: there were no specific police officers assigned to the mall venue at the outset). The problem identification occurred not only through the increase in vehicle theft reports, but through concerns and complaints from the vehicle theft victims, mall patrons and the corporate owners of the mall. Additionally, mall employees, particularly in the prevailing evening hours, raised concerns with regard to overall personal safety issues.

The foundation of an overall proactive problem-solving strategy began in late 1996, when the U.S. Department of Justice C.O.P.S. office announced the Problem Solving Partnerships grant initiatives. An application was tendered and ultimately approved in the amount of \$68,000 and was one of three such approvals in New Jersey and one of seventeen nationally for this area of study. This proved the impetus to begin to tackle this recurring problem in earnest.

Fast-forward ten years... Motor vehicle theft has dropped virtually each year since full implementation of the grant initiative. In fact, the Mall vehicle theft rate has been below 10 vehicles each year in 2004 and 2005. This despite an increase in overall Mall size of 40 %. The result; the auto theft rate despite the vast increase in shopping center size has not increased and in fact has seen a reduction. This area is now the largest regional single retail shopping center in New Jersey yet, auto theft and related crimes are the lowest of comparable size malls in the entire New York metro area.

**Herman Goldstein Award**  
**Motor Vehicle Theft Analysis And Reduction In**  
**Rockaway Township, New Jersey**  
Submission by Chief Walter A. Kimble

**Description:**

The Township of Rockaway is located in Northwestern New Jersey, approximately 30 miles from New York City and 20 miles from Newark New Jersey. The municipality is approximately 44 square miles and has Interstate highway 80 and two State highways running through its southern borders. The Township is also home to the Rockaway Townsquare Mall, one of the five largest shopping centers the in the State of New Jersey.

In 1978, Rockaway was semi rural and had no large business or corporate venues other than the self contained 700 acre Picatinny Arsenal military base. The original developers of the Mall property as well as the police department command staff at the time could not foresee the impact the Mall would have on Rockaway Township. As such, no additional police were added to the patrol ranks to proactively patrol the Mall. The thought processes at the time were that the unsown, unarmed and minimally trained security force would handle all but the worst crime related problems. Additionally, no formal crime mapping or mall specific reporting system was in place nor even contemplated.

As patrons were drawn to the Mall grew in ever increasing numbers, the crime rate began to escalate as well. Specifically notable increases in the areas of vehicle theft, attempted vehicle theft and burglary to motor vehicle type reports. The problem began to take on an identity of it's own not only through recognition of the patrol officers taking the ever increasing number of vehicle theft reports but in other manners as well. The shopping mall owners were receiving complaints from patrons who fell victim to an auto theft or attempted vehicle theft. In attempted theft cases, the vehicles would be damaged (particularly in the steering column area) by the would-be auto thief to the point of being undrivable. This was coupled with concerns over vehicle break-ins where if a vehicle theft was not accomplished, the thief would commit the theft of items from the vehicle (s) in question. In many cases, items that had just been purchased at the mall that very day. The

holiday shopping season proved to be the greatest time of vehicular burglary and theft.

The media also played a role in crime identification as well, reporting on an increasing number of car thefts, pursuits of stolen vehicles from the mall as well as attempted thefts of vehicles where the thief lacked the mechanical knowledge to complete the theft and left the owner with a badly damaged, undriveable vehicle. In one particular case, the Mall Santa Claus was the target of a vicious vehicle break-in where a portion of his costume was stolen. Such cases were widely reported by the print media.

As the years moved forward, it became obvious that the problem was not an anomaly but rather a problem that continued to grow each year. Meetings were held between the Police Chief, Mayor and representatives from the mall owner's corporate headquarters on how to halt this alarming trend. While this was taking place, further concerns were raised by mall patrons on the overall safety of the mall parking areas. There were reports of parents not letting teens in their household work at the mall over growing personal safety fears of walking through the mall parking lot at night to get to their respective vehicles. A study of Uniform Crime Reports of the time indicated that vehicle theft was becoming the number one crime in Rockaway Township and the number one manner in which property was leaving the jurisdiction.

It became apparent that a strategy had to be put into place and done so quickly to begin to halt what was becoming the top auto theft venue in the county. The formulation of a single enforcement strategy began to take shape and was typical of the thinking of most suburban New Jersey law enforcement at the time. That is, to form a task force and flood the specific area (the Rockaway Townsquare Mall parking areas) with both uniformed and plainclothes police to hopefully observe and apprehend would-be car thieves in the act. This form of directed enforcement garnered few successes and as the overtime budget dwindled, the problem reappeared in a more robust manner. There were also resident concerns over the amounts of police overtime funds being expended in a privately owned venue.

At this juncture, a secondary, but related crime problem came to light, that of the vehicle theft related insurance fraud. While examining a number of insurance claims generated from mall auto thefts, it became apparent that a number of the claims had blatant insurance fraud indicators. This further

skewed the ability to conduct effective crime analysis. Again the flawed thinking of the day was “not to utilize police resources to do the insurance companies job (of investigating questionable claims) for them”.

Due to both a lack of dedicated funding and an overall lasting strategy, the vehicle theft problem remained at the forefront of the mall crime (and that of overall crime in Rockaway Township) well into the late 80’s. At that point the Township of Rockaway took a new direction of enforcement for Rockaway Townsquare that of assigning two police officers on a full time basis to the mall along with fully equipped patrol vehicles and a substation. This project was fully funded by the Mall property owners for a period of ten years. Additionally, the LoJack Corporation installed the first stolen vehicle tracking computers in Morris County in the patrol units dedicated to the mall patrol unit. With this project in place, overall order maintenance improved, as did the public perception of crime (and overall personal safety) within the mall areas; most importantly the parking lots. Inroads were being made into the vehicle theft issue as well. A number of key arrests were made of professional auto thieves as well as the identification of two chop shops operating in the area. The first crime analysis of mall crime took place in rudimentary form in 1993. This analysis served to isolate the mall auto theft totals from the overall vehicle theft counts for the U.C.R. This showed that at least one half of all vehicle thefts in Rockaway Township occurred at the Rockaway Townsquare Mall. Such action wet the appetite of police administrators and the mall owners that more could be done to further reduce the problem. Again however, funding became the prevailing issue and the mall property owners were not in a position to provide additional funding over and above the contract for the two uniformed officers. This was particularly true with regard to monies expended for “non-visible” items such as crime mapping, citizen surveys, and target specific education for both the police officers as well as target hardening for the general public and mall patrons.

Fortunately, during this period the U.S. Department of Justice C.O.P.S. office announced a Problem Solving Partnerships grant initiative in 1996, which could be used to target motor vehicle theft as a course of study. This submission was embraced by virtually all the stakeholders in this issue such as the police department, mall property owners, municipal government and most importantly the public we serve. Thus an application package was submitted to the C.O.P.S. office with vehicle theft and related break-ins within the Rockaway Townsquare Mall as the target crime problem.

In late 1996 the United States Justice Department C.O.P.S. Office approved the application and work was begun on a multi-faceted plan to aggressively attack the motor vehicle theft problem plaguing the mall and surrounding areas for nearly 20 years.

Within the ambit of analysis, the project foundation literally had to be constructed from the ground-up in a manner that would collectively move away from the former strategy of police officers blindly driving about the mall parking areas with the intention of interrupting an auto theft in progress.

Motor vehicle theft reports were hand searched utilizing a grant funded non-sworn analyst to thoroughly examine each motor vehicle theft with regard to the following:

- Time of day.
- Day of week.
- Type of vehicle (make, model, year, color).
- Location of theft within the mall i.e. (parking lot number).
- Recovery of vehicle (yes, no).
- Location of recovery (city, town street, general locale).
- Condition of vehicle at time of recovery (type of parts stolen if stripped or chopped).
- Identification and age (adult or juvenile offender) of arrested subjects found in possession of a vehicle from Rockaway Twp.
- Existence of recognized vehicle theft fraud indicators (as identified by the National Insurance Crime Bureau, N.I.C.B.).
- Number of vehicle thefts and vehicle theft related calls for police service.
- Response time to the vehicle theft related calls (very important, since the time that a confirmed stolen vehicle is entered into N.C.I.C. system and related state crime alert systems is paramount to a rapid identification and interception of the stolen auto enroute to it's final location of disposition).
- Completeness and accuracy of the initial vehicle theft report taken by the responding patrol officer.
- Review of the practices of the initial responding mall security personnel and related reports (including response time to notification of Rockaway Twp. Police personnel).

- Examination of the most probable route that the stolen vehicle would be driven to get to it's final location (generally east of our jurisdiction) This analysis was shown to be Interstate 80 East to Interstate 280 East to urban areas and marine ports.
- Identity and vocation of crime victim i.e. was victim a Mall employee, parking in a designated area.

The aforementioned information would serve to begin our crime-mapping database from which data could be generated to most effectively deploy officers within the mall. With such detailed information, the officers deployed **would have the highest probability of apprehending an auto thief in the process of an auto theft.** A stark contrast to just driving about the mall parking lot hoping to spot someone acting suspiciously. Another benefit would be more effective identification and investigation of suspected or validated fraudulent vehicle theft claims and prosecution therein.

From that first tier, grew A.A.T.A.C the newly formed **Anti Auto Theft Action Coalition** whose invited members were stakeholders not only in the vehicle theft issue in Rockaway Township, but also within New Jersey and on a national level (Mr. Robert Murray, N.I.C.B.). At this juncture, our major partner in the grant was the New Jersey Vehicle Theft Investigators Association (N.J.V.T.I.) we sought to share our overall strategy with all N.J.V.T.I. member agencies that we might be able to reduce auto theft statewide.

The second tier saw the involvement of citizens of Rockaway Township through a survey document, (developed by Dr. William Calathes, Criminal Justice Chair, New Jersey City University) which was mailed to a cross section or 3000 Rockaway Township households to encourage residents to share both their views on vehicle theft and carjacking. As an additional target-hardening measure, all respondents to the survey would receive no cost anti theft window etching kits for their vehicles and free installation by trained police officers.

Armed with the aforementioned crime data analysis, effective enforcement operations started in late 1997 and are still in force to this day. Within a year, the effectiveness began to show. Auto theft within the mall dropped

by 20 vehicles in the first year of project implementation and has continued to fall to this day (despite an addition to the mall in which the overall footprint has grown 30% and the parking lot to 6300 lined spaces).

Additional analysis and response indicated two issues. First, the vehicle theft report that the township utilized for over 30 years was very much outdated. A completely new form was developed and implemented from which greater information could be recorded at the time of the theft by the police officer taking the initial theft report. This in fact negated the necessity to hand search reports for pertinent data. The report is still currently currently utilized (with several updates) today. This document was shared with all agency members at the yearly N.J.V.T.I. training conference and is also in use in 13 New Jersey jurisdictions and the Morris County Prosecutor's Office. Secondly, a need to train all of our police officers (not just the mall officers) in anti-auto theft tactics and strategies was identified. This was done in a two-pronged approach. Patrol officers from R.T.P.D. were sent to specific train the trainer courses within the U.S. Additionally, recognized experts in the vehicle theft prevention and detection fields were brought in to teach blocks of instruction at the agency level. This instruction was also made available to personnel from other Morris County law enforcement agencies to enhance the level of training surrounding our jurisdiction. Effectively, this action helped to increase inter-agency cooperation from allied law enforcement agencies that surround our jurisdiction. After accessing the value of the training six months after it's conclusion, it became apparent that a component was still lacking. It was to allow Rockaway Township officers the ability to see first hand the end user or end product of the vehicle theft. Since it was identified that most stolen vehicles were recovered in Essex County area of New Jersey, an alliance was formed with the award winning Essex-Union Auto Theft Task Force. This group has the distinction of taking Newark, New Jersey out of the "top ten" vehicle theft cities in the 1980's. An agreement was reached to allow Rockaway Township Police officers to be detailed to spend one month with the Essex-Union task force. This proved both a popular and effective training tool, as the R.T.P.D. officers were able to participate in chop shop investigations and raids, stolen vehicle identification and related strategies. To aid in such identification, a new document was developed that would make it mandatory R.T.P.D. policy to immediately after N.C.I.C. entry, a FAX with pertinent information of the vehicle stolen would be sent to the Essex-Union Task Force. This was found to markedly increase the likelihood of making an apprehension of the stolen vehicle with the auto thief still in it. In one particular stand out case, a



stolen Honda auto was recovered in 12 minutes after being stolen from the Mall.

In reviewing the policies of the Mall security force, it became apparent that there was (in most cases, a delay in notification to the police department). Working with the mall management personnel, the standard operating policies of the security force were modified, to ensure that when a potential victim notified the security personnel of a potential theft, that the pertinent information was transmitted to the R.T.P.D. police desk. This in effect gave our patrol officers an opportunity to intercept the potential stolen vehicle prior to the vehicle leaving the mall parking areas or access roads. This in turn also reduced the potential of a dangerous high-speed pursuit situation once the stolen vehicle got onto the nearby Interstate 80 roadway.

As the study continued, a small pocket of displacement was identified. Approximately one-half mile from the mall venue lies a senior citizen housing complex. As the proactive enforcement strategy took place within the mall, an increase in stolen vehicles was seen at this complex. To further complicate matters, many of the senior citizen owners did not use their cars each day. Additionally, many of their apartments were located in such an area that they could not see their parked vehicles on a daily basis. Infact, in some cases it was several days before a vehicle theft was formally reported to the police. To combat this, monies from public sources were used to purchase both window anti-theft etching kits and ultra-violet body parts marking kits. These were made available to all senior citizens within Rockaway Township. If desired, the kits would also be installed by a police officer or police explorer free of charge as well. So successful was this initiative, that Governor Christine Whitman gave out the first kits to seniors at a specific ceremony that was extensively covered by the New York television media. The result was a demonstrable reduction in the amount of thefts from that senior citizen housing project. More importantly, the displacement issue did not gain a foothold in any other part of Rockaway Township.

To develop the identity of suspects who had committed theft of vehicles that were recovered, a decision was made by former Chief of Police Joseph Devine. He mandated that **every recovered stolen vehicle from Rockaway Township would be fully processed for evidence of the crime.** Previously, virtually no vehicles had been processed in this manner if they were recovered outside of the jurisdiction. Such action helped to greatly

increase the investigation of the fraudulent vehicle theft claims as well as aid in the prosecution of such cases. To that end, the vehicle theft report was modified to include a declaration from the reporting vehicle theft victim. This was done to effectively raise the penalty from a disorderly persons offense (of false information to law enforcement) to that of a fourth degree crime (false swearing). This crime elevation also allowed a charge of conspiracy to be brought against anyone assisting the victim in filing such a fraudulent report (in the State of New Jersey, a fourth degree crime is an indictable crime by grand jury). Through this enhanced level of investigation and of applying the N.I.C.B. fraudulent vehicle theft indicators, there had been a great reduction of fraudulent vehicle theft claims. Our media partners also agreed to fully publicize such cases in an effort to discourage such actions in the future. The Rockaway Townsquare mall went from a media distinction of an “auto theft haven” to “a place where you don’t want to dump your car”.

Over the years that the grant was in place and has since expired, the basic tenants that were born of the program have been fully integrated into the way the Rockaway Township Police conducts anti-auto theft activities. This has resulted in lasting success in this area to the point that we have been able to focus enforcement efforts to other areas while still maintaining an auto theft ratio, which is among the lowest in the United States for motor vehicle thefts within a shopping mall venue. Such proof lies in current statistics where the vehicle theft rate in the U.C.R. has dropped from a high of 169 in 1987 to a low of 15 vehicles stolen throughout the jurisdiction in the year 2005. Within the ambit of measure for the mall venue, we have experienced a drop from 64 in 1997 (mall vehicle stats were kept since 1993) to 7 vehicles stolen in the years 2004, 2005. Contained in the number of seven vehicles for 2005 is an active and on-going insurance fraud investigation as well. Comparing the years 1993-1999 there were 299 stolen vehicles from the mall. In the years 2000 to 2005 there were 94 vehicles reported stolen. Moreover, the media that once called the Rockaway Townsquare Mall a haven for car thieves has now reported on the issue in a much more positive light. Many articles have been written on the successes in this area including a television report on location showing viewers the tactics that have been employed to reduce auto theft. Additionally, the agency has garnered two significant awards in this area. In 1999, the Rockaway Township Police were awarded the 1999 Vehicle Theft Award of Merit by the International Association of Chief’s of Police (I.A.C.P.) at the yearly conference in Charlotte, N.C. Then Captain (now Chief of

Police) Walter A. Kimble was also indoctrinated as a member of the I.A.C.P. National Vehicle Theft Committee. Also in 1999, the R.T.P.D. auto theft problem solving project was presented at the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (A.C.J.S.) annual conference in Orlando, Florida as a successful long-term police / community partnership that effectively reduced crime in the target area by Dr. William Calathes and Chief Walter A. Kimble.

As crime trend analysis and assessment continued, the Rockaway Township Police identified a new (and difficult to detect) form of vehicle theft, which has received attention throughout the United States. With the advent and installation of comprehensive anti theft systems at the factory level, it has become increasingly more difficult to for a street level car thief to commit a vehicle theft quickly. Car thieves however did not give up stealing cars, they began to work a bit smarter. To this end, we have identified new growth in the area of unlawfully obtaining a key to a vehicle; and the committing of a vehicle theft therein. This has been simply done by a would-be auto thief recording the vehicle identification number (V.I.N.) of the target theft vehicle and going to a car dealership or locksmith. Once at the vendor they claim to be the owner of said vehicle and purchase a key to it. They then return to the vehicle location and steal the vehicle with the key. This method of theft causes virtually no damage, and leaves few investigatory clues, hence the vehicle is worth more in a retitle / retag or export operation. This information was gleaned from the examination of theft vehicles where virtually no damage was noted. Initially the owners were suspected of fraud, however through further investigation, it was determined that the vehicles were stolen by utilizing an illegally obtained ignition key.

The thrust of this new and burgeoning auto theft methodology was so alarming that it received nearly immediate media attention. To bring this issue to the awareness of the law enforcement and the public, Chief Walter A. Kimble and Channel 4 New York investigative reporter Scott Weinberger co-wrote a two-part Emmy nominated auto theft television report "Gone In 60 Seconds". From the public concern that this report generated both within Rockaway Township, surrounding areas of Morris County and New Jersey as a whole, N.J. State Senator Anthony Bucco sponsored specific legislation to combat this new problem. Specifically, Senate Bill No. 2591 (passed 9/3/03) prohibited the production of a motor vehicle key without certain identification. Additionally, the maker of said

key must retain records of manufacturer for five (5) years as required by law. Chief Walter A. Kimble testified before the Senate Law and Public Safety Committee on this issue, citing research in Rockaway Township in this area of vehicle theft. This testimony and Committee members viewing the undercover Channel 4 television footage led to the passage of Senate Bill No.2591.

In summation, history has taught us that since the first horse drawn carriage as a mode of transportation was stolen; the theft of means of conveyance will be with us. Certainly shopping centers and malls, public parking lots, commuter parking areas and similar areas are attractive target venues for the auto thief. Policing such areas is difficult with the ever-increasing demands on law enforcement services. This has been particularly acute since the tragedy of September 11,2001. The challenge to law enforcement remains to not surrender to the auto thief, but remain dedicated to the task, **work smarter, not harder” and to actively utilize the public as an ally in the war on vehicle theft.** The auto theft efforts of the Rockaway Township Police in seeking to reduce the level of vehicle theft in a defined area (which accounted for over 50% of the vehicle stolen in the jurisdiction) have proven successful in terms of implementation per the guidelines of the Federal C.O.P.S. grant. The larger and more significant result is that from this foundation put in place in the mid 90’s agency, efforts have continued to build on the previous successes well into a new decade with extraordinary results. Such results did not lie specifically within the sole jurisdiction of Rockaway Township, but the general strategies and successes were shared with both the law enforcement community and general public to have an overall effect in lowering vehicle theft. A result that each member of the Rockaway Township Police can be proud of.

2005 Thefts By Make/ Model ATV Motorcycle

