

Moped Registration Program
Alexandria City Police Department

Summary

Between 2009 and 2010, the City of Alexandria experienced a dramatic increase in moped larcenies - 214%. The area that was affected the most significantly by this negative trend was known as Arlandria, home to the city's Hispanic population. These residents rely heavily on mopeds as their main source of transportation.

In 2010, Officers Matthew Kramarik and Nicholas Ruggiero began to investigate the moped larcenies. The Alexandria Police Department had recently adopted a Strategic Response System (SRS) to combat crime. SRS is an approach to reducing crime and improving the quality of life for residents, visitors and businesses. Through the assistance of SRS, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero were able to partner with the Police Department's Crime Analysis Unit to pinpoint the specific trends associated with the moped thefts.

In September 2010, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero discovered that there was no registration database to assist police officers in locating owners of stolen mopeds. This greatly reduced the chances of a moped being returned to its rightful owner and hindered in the chances of a successful case being brought forth.

In October 2010, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero assisted in the design of a new electronic moped registration program for the Police Department. This program would allow officers to stop and speak to moped owners, gather all their current information and

input that information in a simple data entry program. This program was easily searchable and accessible to all officers through their mobile computers. Officers would now be able to track down owners of recovered mopeds, and successfully prosecute criminals found with the stolen property.

Through interviews with moped owners, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero found that many were unable to come up with the funds for a proper locking device. As a result, many mopeds were left unlocked and easy targets for criminals. The officers were able to procure four hundred locks. They also came up with a way to apply a Police Department registration number on the mopeds that would not cause any damage to the moped through the assistance of black light technology.

As a result of these efforts, the program was able to assist in the successful arrest of an offender who attempted to steal a moped. More officers are now patrolling the designated areas, and there have been no new moped thefts since the program began.

Description

A. Scanning

Towards the end of 2010, vehicle thefts were at an all-time low in the City of Alexandria, with thefts down sixty-two offenses, or eighteen percent compared to the previous year. However, buried beneath this statistic was a new identifiable trend in thefts. In researching the type of vehicle most often stolen, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero discovered that there was an upward trend in moped thefts. Diving deeper into the issue, they found that moped thefts had raised city wide from a total of seven thefts for all of 2009 to twenty-two in 2010 (Crime Analysis chart 1). This rise in thefts was a 214% increase over a one year time span. No program was formulated prior to this time, as the issue had not been identified as a problem, with moped thefts typically remaining in the single digits annually.

By the end of October 2010, a month that consisted of six separate moped thefts, a trend emerged that thefts were occurring an average of one every five days. Due to the fact that most owners did not retain the original paperwork and titles to the mopeds, it was difficult to enter the mopeds into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), a computerized index of criminal justice information, to verify if the moped is stolen in any state across the nation. In addition, the Commonwealth of Virginia does not require a moped to be registered, as it is not considered a motor vehicle. As a matter of practice, street level officers do not typically stop mopeds that pass them. Mopeds are not required to display any type of license plate or placard that an officer can visually scan, so when

necessary, officers have to stop the moped and check the entire vehicle identification number to see if it is stolen.

The Police Department had recently adopted a Strategic Response System (SRS) to assist commanders and officers in identifying crime trends and statistics. SRS allows the Department to compare crime trends on a regional and local level, in an attempt to find similarities and combat the criminal behavior.

Through the information obtained from SRS, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero were able to identify the Arlandria community in the city as the centralized location for moped thefts. In fact, it was determined that ninety percent of the thefts occurred in one specific community, the City's Arlandria community.

The Arlandria community has experienced a significant decrease in crime over the past years. As a result, when a crime trend is identified, it becomes a goal to not only decrease the trend but to prevent it from happening again.

With this information Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero began to look into the reasons why mopeds were targeted. Officers conducted hours of foot patrol and scanning the designated area and discovered that almost half of the mopeds located were left unlocked. In addition, there was no theft prevention device on most mopeds, thus making it a crime of opportunity to take them. Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero met with their commander and proposed to start a moped registration program within the Police Department to assist officers and owners with moped theft abatement. The original intent of the program was not only to assist with locating owner information for stolen mopeds, but also to increase the visibility of the Department in moped theft prevention. The

strategy was to decrease the moped thefts by educating the owner on theft prevention techniques.

The Arlandria community is a small neighborhood nestled between Arlington County and the City of Alexandria. Arlandria is also popularly known as Chirilagua, for the El Salvadoran village that was at one time home to many of its residents. As of a 2010 census, the City of Alexandria has 139,966 residents. This number comprises of a Hispanic population that encompasses seventeen percent of the total population of the city, or roughly fifteen thousand residents. Most of this population resides in Arlandria.

In speaking with residents in Arlandria as to their primary mode of transportation, it was determined that public transportation and mopeds were the most utilized.

At the beginning of this process, it was determined that more than 55 percent of the moped thefts occurred in large apartment complex settings. Seventy-five percent of the mopeds located by Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero were parked in front of or to the side of the buildings, and in the alleys surrounding the complexes. All of the mopeds found were parked in areas that were poorly lit, and they were left completely unsecured. More than half of the mopeds were parked in large groups, thus enabling an offender to steal more than one at a time if desired and elude capture because the City of Alexandria is surrounded by several jurisdictions.

Several jurisdictions and major thoroughfares surround the City of Alexandria. Within seconds an offender can transport a moped easily from the City of Alexandria into Fairfax County, Arlington County or Washington D.C. This made it difficult to recover the stolen mopeds within the City of Alexandria.

B. Analysis

Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero utilized the Alexandria Police Department's Strategic Response System (SRS) to analyze the areas impacted by the moped thefts. Alexandria's Strategic Response System (SRS) is a comprehensive approach to reducing crime, the fear of crime and improving the quality of life for residents, visitors and businesses. SRS relies on traditional policing strategies supported by the analysis of crime trends, series and patterns. Additionally, SRS emphasizes the use of problem-solving strategies to tackle difficult and long-term crime and disorder issues.

Utilizing the information from the Strategic Response System model, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero researched the individual crimes through the help of the Police Department's Police Reporting and Investigative Search Modules system (PRISM). PRISM is a searchable database that allows officers to search for information on individual crimes, calls for service, reports and all individuals involved or associated in a reportable offense. Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero compiled the offense dates, times, patterns and identified the victims. They determined that the Arlandria community was the most affected.

Because the Arlandria community consists predominantly of a Hispanic population and many of its residents are undocumented immigrants who cannot speak or understand the English language, there is an inherent distrust and fear in regard to law enforcement. Many fear they will be deported if they have any contact with the police and tend to underreport crime incidents. Knowing this, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero

personally spoke with individuals in the neighborhood and took the time to explain what and why they were in the community, and how it would benefit the residents.

In their discussions with residents, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero determined that the majority of the victims were unable to produce documentation on their mopeds, such as vehicle identification numbers, bills of sale, or model numbers. This made it impossible for police to enter the mopeds into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) as stolen. If a moped was recovered, it was further difficult to determine if it had been stolen, as most owners simply knew the color of the moped and an approximate time it was taken, limiting the chances for a successful return of the property.

Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero determined that there was no searchable database within the Police Department to identify and locate the make and model of mopeds. Instead, an officer would have to search through all stolen reports and attempt to match the description of the owner's recollection with the recovered property.

Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero interviewed twenty moped owners and discovered that most had no way of securing their moped and could not afford to purchase a locking device. In some cases, victims advised of multiple theft attempts that were not reported to law enforcement. During the interviews, the owners stated they would lock their mopeds if they were able to afford a proper locking device. The moped owners stated that if they had a suitable and centralized location for moped storage within the complex, they would utilize it.

Officer Kramarik and Ruggiero conducted a site visit to the largest apartment complex in the Arlandria area, where ninety percent of the moped thefts had occurred. The complex consists of 21 separate buildings. The complex is comprised of low income

house and government assisted living. They discovered that multiple mopeds were being stored unsecured, in dark and secluded alleys. The apartment management company allowed owners to store their mopeds in the rear of the apartment buildings. The majority of the mopeds stored were in areas off the main street and difficult for police to observe a crime in progress. There was no designated area for owners to secure their mopeds. Most owners were attempting to lock their mopeds to the bike racks that were adjacent to the front of the buildings. When walking through the complex it was also discovered that the complex lighting was not functional and gang graffiti was prevalent.

C. Response

Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero knew that in order to effectively respond to the issue of moped thefts, they would first have to get the support from the moped owners. The owners themselves would have to take proper steps to ensure they would not become victims in the future.

Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero knew that the following must be achieved for them to get their desired results of reducing and eventually eliminating moped thefts:

- A moped registration program must be designed and officers must be able to access it on their mobile computers.
- A proper locking device for the mopeds would have to be found and distributed to owners.
- Hot spots would have to be identified and an increase in patrol by officers would have to take place.

- Mopeds registered should be identified quickly as being registered through the Police Department. This would make it an undesirable target for would-be criminals.
- The Department would partner with the apartment management company of the location that was hit hardest by thefts. Designate a “moped only” parking area that is well lit and visible to patrolling officers.
- The Department would partner with Alexandria City agencies such as Traffic and Environmental Services, Code Enforcement, and Parking enforcement.

In response to the first goal, the registration program, Officers Kramarik Ruggiero conferred with the Police Department’s Crime Analysis Unit to create a data entry program. The program runs much the same way as a standard field interview stop. When an officer with the Police Department stops and interviews a suspicious subject, they enter all the information (name, date of birth, address, phone numbers, etc), into a program that, when sent to the server, allows other officers and detectives to search individuals for possible crimes. The new program would allow officers to use a drop down box that is labeled “moped registration.” This program would be an easy transition, as all officers in the City are familiar with it. While developing the program, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero knew the database needed to be informative. It needed to show the newest information entered, and be searchable within a twenty-four hour time frame, thus ensuring that up to date owner information was available. This database would be housed on the Police Departments PRISM database, enabling it to be searched by

department personnel when investigating a moped theft. The database would consist of useful information such as the make, model, and color and VIN number. Also included would be the owner's current address, phone number, Police Department-generated registration identification number, and the location at which the moped is normally stored. The database would be searchable to allow officers and dispatchers to immediately identify stolen mopeds, and would be readily accessible on their department issued mobile computers.

The second goal Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero identified was finding a proper locking device for the moped owners. They contacted several companies that made locks specifically for mopeds, but were unable to find a company willing to assist at no cost. The officers studied the locking devices available to the public, and while researching available locks recalled that the department had a large supply of Glock gun locks in storage that were not being utilized. The device is a bottom-locking unit that requires a key to open (*see photo 1*). The devices came with individual keys that could not open another Glock lock device. Attached to the lock is a plastic coated wire that easily fits around moped tires. The locks are bright yellow and visible from more than four hundred feet, alerting police that the moped is secure.

Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero made contact with the Police Department's Firearms Range Master and made a request to obtain approximately 200 of the locks for the moped theft abatement program. They were provided with over 400. The officers came up with a number tracking system for each lock given to the moped owners and added it to the registration program.

After testing multiple devices, it was discovered that most standard markers could easily be disguised or removed by criminals. Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero utilized black light ink technology (*see photo 2*) to number each lock and moped. This technology allowed the officers to apply a Police Department registration number to a moped that was not visible to the naked eye. The technology ensured that no mopeds were damaged during the process. The mopeds were labeled under the VIN plate at the front of the mopeds (*see photo 4*). This would enable an officer who recovers a moped to immediately check for any black light ink, and would thus allow the number to be researched with the newly developed moped registration program on their computers. Officers would then have the ability to make contact with the owner, establish if an offense had occurred, and develop a strong criminal case against any offenders.

To address their third goal, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero conducted roll call training and information sessions with the patrol section of the Police Department. They disseminated information on the location of the moped thefts, as well as dates and times. The officers explained the programs they were developing and requested any feedback the officers could give. The officers were very receptive and asked questions to ensure they were doing everything in their power to assist the officers in the theft prevention program.

The fourth goal Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero set was to ensure the registered mopeds were visible to would-be criminals as being registered with the Police Department. The highly visible, yellow locks ensured that this was achieved (*See Picture 3*). A potential criminal would see this lock and it would have the same deterrent effect

that a steering wheel club would. The lock base is made of metal, and if the moped is dragged on the street it leaves a trail assisting officers investigating a moped larceny.

In achieving the final goal, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero went to three of the most populated apartment complexes in the Arlandria area. They met with the complex managers and requested that all mopeds be moved to a designated area within the complex. These areas would have plenty of light and a post or something comparable to secure the mopeds to. It was requested that the locations be close to the main streets so that they would be highly visible to patrol officers. Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero partnered with the City's Transportation and Environmental Services (T&ES) Department to ensure that parking on the street closest to the main road are designated for moped only parking. T&ES offered to provide assistance by conducting site visits and obtaining the communities' input on making moped-only parking areas. This would allow officers patrolling to observe the mopeds from the main road and make it undesirable to steal mopeds. Having a designated moped parking area would allow officers to register new mopeds and distribute locks to moped owners in need.

D. Assessment

Within a week of taking on the project, Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero registered approximately 100 mopeds. In doing so, the owners were educated on the moped theft situation and on what they could do to prevent themselves from being targets of crime. Almost immediately, there was a noticeable difference. More mopeds were parked in well-lit areas and locked properly.

A little over a week after the project began, on November 5, 2010, the first true test to the effectiveness of the program occurred. A male subject attempted to steal a moped from the same complex from which Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero were active in reducing the moped thefts. Patrol officers were present in the “hot spot” area and identified the offender attempting to push a moped down the street with a yellow lock (the same one distributed by Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero) fastened to the rear wheel of the moped. The owner had not properly secured the moped to any post. However, the officers were able to immediately identify the moped as one that was registered through the Police Department. The officers stopped the offender and were able to determine that the moped did not belong to him. Prior to this program being introduced, the officers would have had the time-consuming task of attempting to locate an owner of the moped. This may or may not have produced results. If an owner was not located, the subject would be released after the officers gathered all of the “offenders” information. Before charges could be sought, the officers ran the moped through the NCIC database and this advised them that the moped was not entered as stolen. NCIC was unable to return any owner information. However utilizing the Police Department’s new moped registration program, the officers were able to get the owners’ last known address, the moped VIN numbers and a current telephone number. The owner of the moped stated that he had not given anybody permission to use his moped, and that it must have just been stolen. With this information, the patrol officers on scene were able to take the offender into custody immediately and proceed with formal charges. The moped was returned to the owner with no damage, and at completely no loss to the owner. The owner lost no time at work due to a lack of transportation. Detectives were able to obtain a search warrant for the

suspect's house. As a result of the search, four additional stolen mopeds were located. Three of the stolen mopeds were from other jurisdictions. However, the other jurisdictions did not currently have a moped registration program and they were unable to get the contact information for the moped owners; thus inhibiting the police in filing proper charges for those thefts.

The goal of the program was to lower, and potentially rid the Arlandria community of moped thefts. This could only be achieved by forming partnerships within the community.

Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero have reduced moped larcenies by 196% year to date. There has not been a single moped theft after the arrest was made in November. The Police Department's Crime Analysis Unit partnered with the officers and worked diligently to develop a database that was filled with information that patrol officers could utilize immediately and make their jobs easier.

Moped larcenies are a regional trend at this time. Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero are committed to the program's success. To make this program more successful regionally, they have partnered with other Community Oriented Police Sections in neighboring jurisdictions to pass on the success of the program and assist with the potential for a regional database in the future.

Officers Kramarik and Ruggiero continue to actively seek moped owners for the registration program. The moped owners continue to be very receptive and continue to change their ways to help the City of Alexandria become free of moped thefts permanently.

Officers Information

Key Project Team Members:

City of Alexandria Police Department

Community Oriented Police Section

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Black Light Technology Identification

Photo 1



Moped lock with registration number

Photo 2



Moped lock with black light ink at night

Picture 3



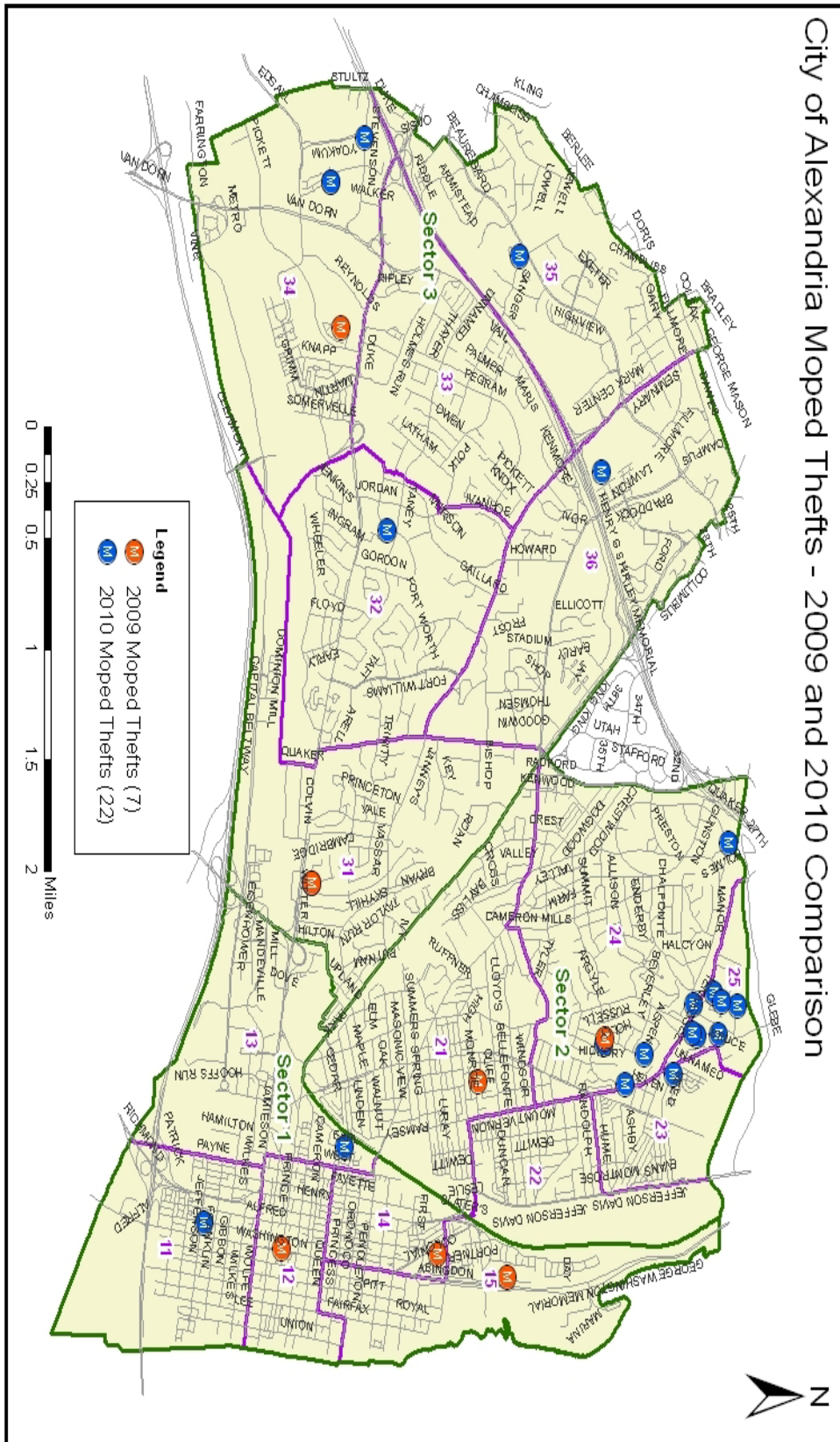
Yellow high visibility lock on moped

Photo 4

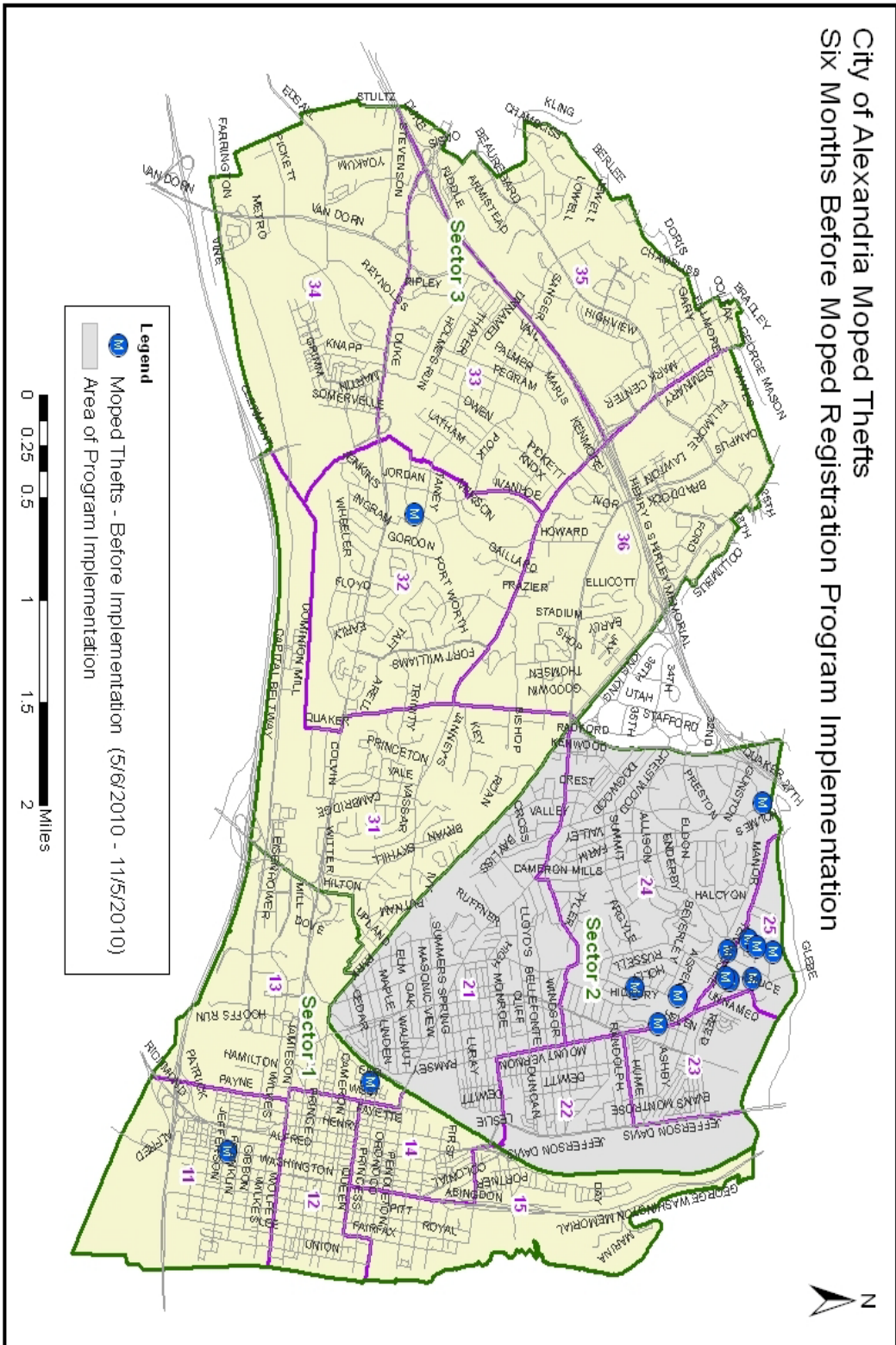


VIN plate on moped

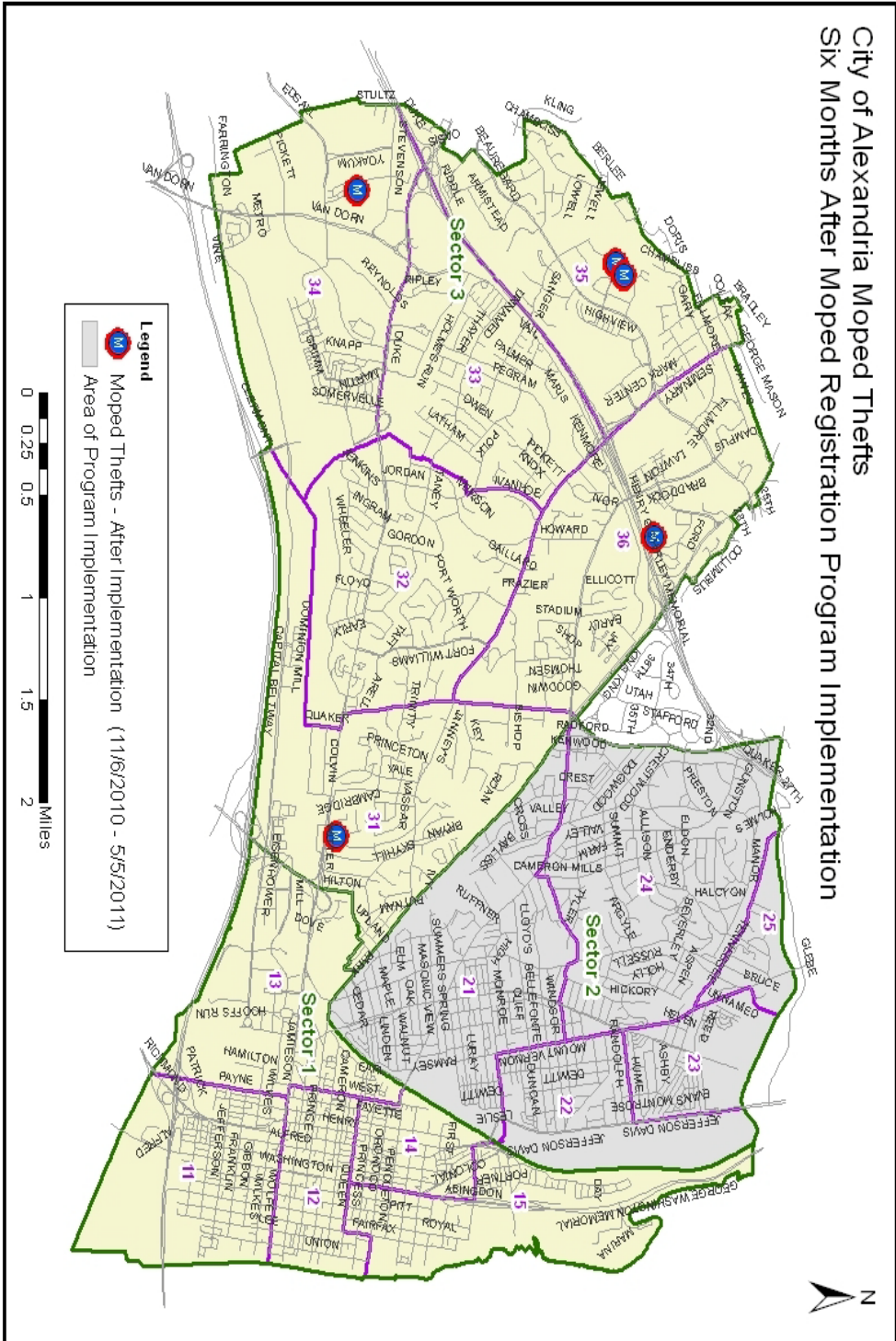
City of Alexandria Moped Thefts - 2009 and 2010 Comparison



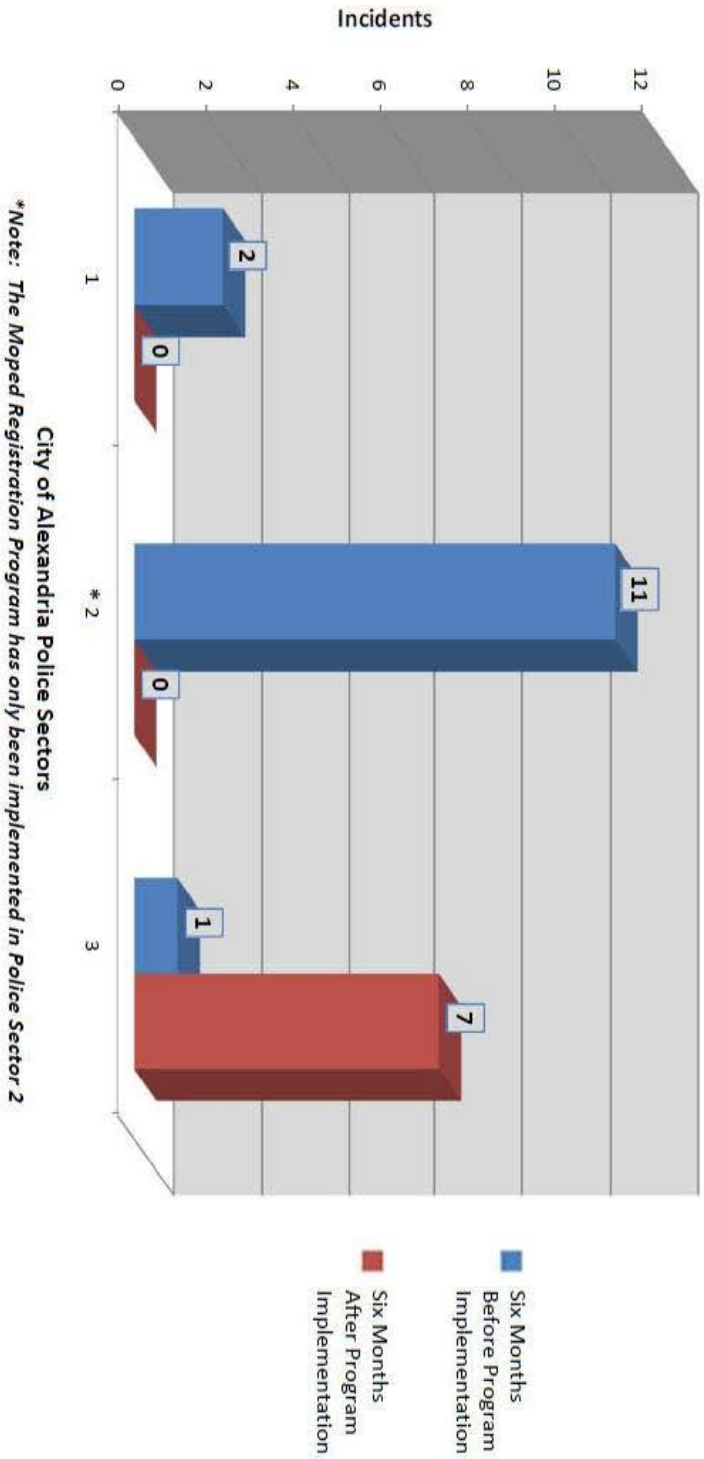
City of Alexandria Moped Thefts Six Months Before Moped Registration Program Implementation



City of Alexandria Moped Thefts Six Months After Moped Registration Program Implementation



Moped Registration Program - Six Month Comparison Chart



2011 data is still raw and has not been verified. Data contained in this report is from the Alexandria (VA) Police Department's Record Management System

