

SUMMARY

This crime and disorder initiative is titled operation ARENA, it concerns an expanse of land situated between a number of valley communities. It is commonly referred to as the `British`.

The British covers approximately six square kilometres. It is infamous as an area subjected to all kinds of vehicle crime and abuse. It is probably the largest single dumping ground in the South Wales Region. There are a number of `sites' containing numerous vehicles, the largest single site by far is known as the ravine, which is found near to the disused mine shafts and tips of Talywain.

Examination of the area as a whole identified that there was in excess of one hundred and forty vehicles. Two of the sites, which have streams that run into the local water table, were filled with burnt out vehicles.

There was also fly tipping of substantial proportions, in particular of old pneumatic tyres which exceeded the thousand mark and actually filled a natural gully at one of the sites.

The problems were rightly identified as criminal, anti-social and environmental.

A local crime and disorder action team was developed specifically for this problem. As the initiative progressed it developed into four phases.

- Intelligence gathering.
- Covert operation (with reactive capability).
- Clearance.
- Preventative measures.

The first two phases resulted in the detection of a number of offences and arrests. The third phase proved outstanding at raising awareness of vehicle crime and fly tipping. The area was restored to its former rugged beauty. The final stage saw preventative measures deployed around the worst site.

The following partners were involved in Operation ARENA: -

- Keep Britain Tidy Group
- Linley wightman Shaw Foundation
- Gwent Police
- Royal Engineers
- Environment Agency
- Onyx Mines Ltd
- Mobile vehicle crushing unit
- Probation Service
- Local Authority
- Garnsychan Partnership.

This is a prime example of what can be achieved when a Problem-orientated approach is coupled with a multi agency commitment.

DESCRIPTION OF `ARENA`

As mentioned in the project summary, Operation ARENA concerns the mountainside area between the valley communities of predominantly ABERTILLERY and PONTYPOOL. It is historically a contentious issue and a number of police operations and initiatives have been conducted with varying degrees of success. The area suffers from vehicle crime and abuse, there are a number of sites containing numerous stolen or abandoned vehicles. The largest, known as the ravine, containing over seventy vehicles in early 1999.

Having recognised that this particular project encompassed criminal, social and environmental aspects meetings were arranged between police, local authority members and local councillors. The initial feedback from the community via the councillors was quite vociferous and emotive. As a result a local crime and disorder action team was developed purely to tackle this problem.

Analysis of information obtained from the local authority and recorded police incidents identified three main issues.

- Vehicle crime (stolen vehicles set alight or stripped of parts)
- Environmental issues (including pollution, large scale fly tipping of general waste and vehicle tyres)
- Vehicle abuse / nuisance (predominantly off road motorcycles)

Because of the scope of problems identified it was recognised and agreed that the main issues above needed to be treated separately. This was necessary to allow a greater focus on the set objectives. Due to the enormity of the task, at an early stage it was decided that this required a vast interagency approach if it was to be successful. This part of `ARENA` deals with the first two issues that were closely linked.

The aim was to break the cycle of vehicle crime at this location and to address the pollution and fly tipping that was as great a problem. It was recognised that the information held in essence by the police, on incidents and vehicles at this location was useful but limited. To provide a greater insight into the root causes of this problem it was necessary to physically examine every vehicle and its position on the mountainside. The database created was able to provide some interesting insights into

the vehicles dumped at this site. Vehicles broadly fell into one of four categories.

1. Stolen vehicles that have been totally stripped and cut in half.
2. Stolen vehicles abandoned having been set on fire.
3. Stolen vehicles abandoned and filled with rocks.
4. Abandoned vehicles not shown as stolen of usually scrap value.

These results clearly displayed that the area was being used by differing elements of the criminal fraternity.

1 The first group provided evidence of organised theft and car 'ringing'. The vehicles had been totally stripped and cut in half. Identification of these carcasses proved extremely difficult.

The photographs obtained of the site give a clear indication of the difficult terrain in which the operation was mounted.

2. The vehicles in the second group were by far the largest in number, and indicative of the setting on fire of stolen vehicles as a means of frustrating further investigation.

3. The third group of vehicles was relatively small in number, every one of these was found at the bottom of the ravine. The only conclusion drawn, in the absence of any further information, was that this increased the 'rolling' effect of the vehicle whilst dropping thus making it more spectacular.

4. The fourth group consisted of vehicles of little or no value that were not reported as stolen and had no current registered keeper on the Police National Computer.

Analysis of where the vehicles had been stolen or last registered provided no patterns or trends, other than vehicles stolen as far away as Cardiff and Bristol were ending up at this location.

The question, 'why the British?' was also asked, an examination of the area posed the following:-

The area is remote and lends itself to the abandonment of stolen vehicles with little chance of detection. Approaching vehicles can be seen some distances away. Vehicles cannot be recovered from a number of the sites without specialist equipment. There is little police activity and all such activity involves officers in vehicles.

This is a common theme throughout the South Wales area where stolen vehicles are quite often taken to remote areas and set alight.

The recovery of vehicles was recognised as a crucial factor, where vehicles had little or no fire damage but unable to be recovered attracted individuals that stole parts off the vehicles. This was evidenced from the inception of ARENA where officers witnessed a number of unrecoverable vehicles that were dismantled over a period of time. There is also evidence to suggest, again not as a result of ARENA, that some criminals would steal vehicles, abandon them at a site where recovery is not possible and return the following day to remove the items required. Their `mens rea' believing them to be viewed then as a scavenger, as opposed to a thief in the eyes of the law.

From this basis the crime and disorder action team loosely formulated a response to these problems, they were in four phases

1. Police operation
2. Clearance of the area
3. Media
4. Preventative measures

POLICE OPERATION

As mentioned previously a number of police operations had taken place at this location over a number of years. These were examined to identify areas of good and bad practice in order to tailor an effective response for ARENA.

Most previous operations had simply put officers onto the access roads leading to the area, or used high profile marked vehicles. The result of this type of approach saw a reduction in vehicles using the roads, as knowledge of police activity spread. This could not be actually

evidenced but was accepted as the case, by officers who had worked the areas concerned.

The very same factors that attract this type of crime to the British, i.e. a large isolated area also frustrate police attempts to utilise any technical surveillance or other conventional methods.

As a consequence of the analysis of the vehicles already on the mountainside, the objective of any subsequent operation would be to target commercial vehicles and those travelling in convoy. It was suspected because of the remoteness, that when a vehicle was abandoned the thieves would use another, possibly legitimate vehicle to leave the area. Therefore the remit of the operation would require it to be selective in what vehicles to check. It would also in essence have to remain covert to stay viable for longer periods of time.

At this stage the police operation was split into two phases. Phase one involved intelligence gathering with minimal resources, this afforded an opportunity to identify the optimum positions and shifts. Phase two saw the deployment of covert observation teams, all the roads to the British were placed under covert observations. On the mountain itself a uniform response was available, but kept at a carefully selected location, that could not be seen by passing vehicles.

The remit of the covert teams was to be selective in what vehicles were worthy of further attention. In particular commercial type vehicles, such as a transit or those that appear to be travelling in convoy as well as fully laden vehicles.

This part of ARENA netted the following results:-

- Six persons caught stealing from vehicles.
- Two arrested for theft of a vehicle.
- Two drug offences arrests.
- One disqualified driver.
- Numerous construction and use offences.

It was interesting to note that the two arrested for theft of a vehicle travelled exactly as intelligence predicted in convoy, and the stolen vehicle ended up in the main ravine.

CLEARANCE

The clean up of the area began on the 15^x of October 1999, in the lead up to this stage a number of partners and agencies were approached for either direct assistance or sponsorship.

The Keep Britain Tidy group provided funding and organised the publicity. The weekend was termed a 'COUNTRYSIDE OFFENSIVE' and was officially launched by the former crimewatch presenter Sue COOK. Representatives of this group prior to the clearance visited local schools and highlighted the implications of vehicle crime and fly tipping.

The Royal Engineers, 10.1 Battalion REME (volunteers) brought specialist recovery vehicles and equipment from all over Wales. The army provided their personnel free of charge and camped on site over the weekend. The initiative was used as a training exercise for the battalion who were due to go to Kosovo after the event.

GWENT Police provided personnel to assist the Royal Engineers and were responsible for co-ordinating all the agencies present. A mobile crime dome was erected to provide shelter and refreshments. They developed a poster using an example from the area to highlight the problems and raise social responsibility.

The Environment agency checked pollution levels in the streams contaminated and was able to assist with incidents such as oil or petrol spillage whilst recovering vehicles.

The Probation service assisted with volunteers that were serving community sentences. These took part in clearing the general debris and vehicle tyres.

A number of local school children wearing 'countryside offensive' tabards and sweatshirts assisted with the smaller debris.

A local coach company provided a shuttle service for local and visiting dignitaries.

A DVLA sub- contractor supplied free of charge, a mobile crushing unit that was placed on the mountain and crushed the vehicles as they were recovered.

A local recovery service provided a small flatbed type vehicle that was used to transport vehicles to the crushing unit.

The local Authority closed the area for the weekend and assisted with on site facilities and skips for the debris collected.

The mining company Onyx who owns some of the land provided funding towards the preventative measures.

Insurance companies were approached and provided some funding towards the initiative.

PREVENTION

The ravine having been identified as the priority site for preventative measures saw natural barriers deployed along its entire length. This was vital in order to break the cycle of vehicles left in the ravine in a position where traditional recovery is not an option.

This has been supported by high visibility policing and a policy of positive action should a vehicle be found abandoned in this area. Operation ARENA is currently ongoing in respect of Vehicle Abuse and fly tipping. Interagency co operation is still strong and effective work is continuing to achieve the objectives set.

In one weekend, for the first time that many people can remember, the area was completely free of burnt out vehicles. Over one hundred and forty vehicles were recovered and crushed on site.

The ravine is still clear of vehicles and debris some seven months later. Although it is early days the area has seen a substantial decrease in vehicle crime and fly tipping.

This part of ARENA displays what can be achieved with an intelligence led, multi agency approach into a large-scale criminal, social and environmental problem.

MEDIA

A media strategy was defined from the outset of this project, this was to maximise the benefits of the project and to reinforce the environmental and social effects to the community.

Press releases were issued to all national, regional and local media along with digital images of the worst areas.

Some of the coverage achieved included: -

- Sky news (live broadcast over two days)
- BBC Radio 1
- HTV Wales
- BBC TV Wales
- Fell — Welsh children 's TV program

Press column centimetres 1,235

National radio 2 min 30 seconds

Regional radio 1 min 55 seconds

National TV 7 minutes

Regional TV 12 minutes

COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Cost benefit analysis techniques assess the merits and demerits of projects, in particular those with community benefits.

The following are cost approximations of benefits in kind.

<u>Description</u>	<u>Cost Equivalent</u>
Press coverage	£22,939
Radio coverage	£5,184
TV coverage	£156,750
Probation Service	£460:00
Refreshment and refreshment tent	£1,000
Army time / removal costs	£5,000
Total	<u>£191,333</u>

The amount invested by the various partners was less than £ 18,000.

Cost / benefit ratio - £191,333/£18,000 £10:62

Therefore for every £ 1 invested by the partners there was a further £ 10:62 returned in benefits.

CONCLUSION

The problem of abandoned stolen vehicles at this location had a long history. In the past the police had set in place operations consisting of a single agency response with limited success.

The area continued to blight the surrounding communities. The project was identified and researched, the multi agency approach that became Operation 'ARENA' was initiated.

The project utilised the skill of the constituent partners to not only analyse the problem identified, but, to arrest offenders and set in place preventative measures to ensure that the initial objectives came to fruition.

The success of the project is evidenced by the lack of any abandoned stolen vehicles being found in the ravine in the seven months since Operation 'ARENA' cleared the area.

Inter agency co operation is continuing with investigations into the illegal disposal of tyres and fly tipping of general waste. With the improvement of the area since October, incidents of fly tipping have also drastically reduced.

In relation to the issue of vehicle abuse, consultation is taking place with a view to providing a legitimate controlled site for off road motorcycling.

A number of proactive days targeting the off road motorcyclists have also taken place under the other wing of 'ARENA' which has caused a reduction in the number of complaints received.

Overall Operation `ARENA' utilised the skills of a wide and diverse group of agencies. They identified a problem, proposed a comprehensive and long-term solution and implemented that solution, to the benefit of the surrounding communities.

The area has been restored to its original natural rugged beauty; each of the constituent partners can take credit in this excellent example of a Problem Orientated Policing.

*COUNTRYSIDE OFFENSIVE
REPORT*



15th — 17th October 1999

By Ginette Unsworth
Communications Manager



WHOSE PROBLEM?



IT'S YOURS

- Toxic fumes will poison the air you breathe.
- Wrecked cars are a dangerous magnet for children and animals.
- If you own a car, your premium will go up as insurance companies will assume you live in a high risk area.
- It encourages others to use your area as a dumping ground.
- It may prolong fire fighters from attending a house fire.



If you have any information in relation to vehicle crime please contact

Pontypool Police Station on 01495 764711 Ext: 2650 1 2670



