

OPERATION CLAMP

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Category: Crime and Disorder Reduction
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ABSTRACT

At its inception, Operation Clamp was aimed at reducing the volume of complaints concerning abandoned vehicles populating residential parking areas. The nature of the complaints often related to vehicles that appeared to be abandoned and/or did not have a valid excise disc. Residents were particularly disadvantaged due to the lack of adequate parking facilities within the residential area that had a further impact on safety through causing obstructions and hazards. A large number of unlicensed vehicles also indicated that a number of potentially 'unroadworthy' vehicles were populating the roads of Skelmersdale (postcode WN8) and endangering the safety of other road users as well as pedestrians.

The problem had been experienced in the area for a number of years and had been generating a number of complaints from both the public and council. Police officers, housing offices, estate management boards, and the fire brigade also contributed to recognising the problem. In the year prior to the operation, over 100 complaints were logged in the system (see Appendix A). The secondary evidence was gathered in April 1999 and was comprised of a PNC report of all void vehicles in the area. This revealed that of 25,000 (estimated) vehicles; approximately 7,000 were unlicensed in the Skelmersdale area.

Skelmersdale officers established a liaison relationship with the DVLA (and their agents, Sureway Parking) to begin immobilisation, removal and disposal of unlicensed vehicles in order to respond to the issue. Partnerships were also established with West Lancashire District Council, Local Housing Offices, Estate Management Boards, local Post Office staff and the Skelmersdale Fire Service in order to effectively target vehicles and locations.

Over an eight-day period, over 1,300 vehicles were taxed at the local post offices - this was considered a considerable increase from normal transactions. A total of 108 vehicles were removed from the area and 30 of these vehicles (28% of removed vehicles) were used by active criminals in a variety of offences. We measured our operational impact through monitoring the number of excise applications, number of vehicles removed, number of CLE2/6 issued, revenue generated, public perception (through press coverage and complaints/information), and known criminals affected (removing their vehicles).

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Objectives

The Operation was planned as a response to the number of unlicensed vehicles populating the streets of Skelmersdale. The project specifically targeted vehicles that were reported and/or discovered not displaying a valid excise licence. Through both removing the vehicles and notifying and fining owners, this operation sought to improve the safety of roads in terms of minimising obstructions, remove unsafe or unroadworthy vehicles from the locality as well as promote compliance with the Road Traffic Act. In addition to these objectives, the operation also sought to reduce the opportunity for criminal damage and arson of abandoned or non-licensed vehicles. In turn, the operation looked to disrupt the activities of local criminals by removing their own vehicles as well as access to neglected ones that had the potential to be used in the commission of a crime.

Success Criteria

The success of the operation was dependent upon increasing the number of vehicles taxed; removing unlicensed vehicles; ensuring that every vehicle on the road was in the process of updating its tax history (including the collection of excise duty evasion) through placing CLE 2/6 forms on vehicles; and, generating revenue through excise duty paid at post offices, back taxes, vehicle removal fee, etc. The operation also sought to improve the perception the public had of our activities. This was measured not through a public perception survey but through the number of calls received from the public offering information, support and complaints. Lastly, operational success was tied to the seizing of known criminal's vehicles and/or vehicles that were known to have been used in the commission of an offence.

Problem Identification

The issue had been within the sector for a long period of time but had never achieved major recognition as a quality of life issue within the police service. With the Constabulary's shift in focus to tackling problems that impact the public's perception of being safe, involved and re-assured - this endemic problem was identified as requiring attention. The number of complaints were received at a persistent level (99 calls in 1999) for a period of years but had not been recognised as a significant issue until this point (see Appendix A). This was also the first opportunity within the section to attempt to implement a problem-based approach to resolving the issue.

Problem Prioritisation

Failing to address the issue was having an adverse affect on divisional performance and operational efficiency and indicted that this problem demanded attention in addition to the volume of complaints from the public. A major factor influencing the prioritisation

individuals and Organisational Involvement

PC: Eckersley initiated the project having identified the problem and devised the operational planning process as well as implementing POP procedures as the most appropriate method of addressing the issue. PC Eckersley conducted the initial research into the problem and became the contact point for all stakeholder agencies that became involved in the operation. Within the policing organisation, Community Beat Officers and Uniformed Patrol Officers were involved in compiling the operational target list as well as carrying out operational duties. The Intelligence Unit was involved in developing intelligence on the locations, patterns and movement of the operational target list. The major stakeholder agencies were the DVLA (and their agents Sureway Parking) who were primarily responsible for actively immobilising, removing and disposing unlicensed vehicles. The local Council provided the police with additional information that had been submitted to them from complainants. The Estate Management Boards and the local Council Housing Offices were involved in the foot patrol of estates locating unlicensed vehicles and providing this information to the police for further action. The local Post Office staff maintained a log of all vehicles issued with excise licences. Lastly, the Station Officer for the Fire Service identified areas where there were a high number of vehicle fires that corresponded with the clusters identified by both the police and the local Council.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

Sources and Information

A number of sources were consulted in the planning and analytical phase of the project and included information and sources outside of law enforcement. The PNC (Police National Computer) was interrogated and provided a list of all void vehicles (vehicles without excise licences) within the WN8 postcode area and included registration numbers, owners, location, vehicle details, etc. This information was used in conjunction with data retrieved from Lancashire Constabulary's own INTEL and INOE systems that was in turn, mapped using ibase to fully appreciate the problem geographically. Complaints recorded in the police incident reporting system were examined and were combined with incidents recorded by the local council and housing offices. The Council also provided the details of all 7-day notices attached to vehicles (notices attached to vehicle windscreens informing the owner of a seven-day period before the vehicle is removed and disposed of by the Council) for review. The area Housing Offices and Estate Management Board members also provided a list of unlicensed vehicles collated through conducting actual street visits. The details relating to burned vehicles kept by the Fire Service further enhanced the holistic approach to source identification and problem resolution.

Analytical Process and Involvement

The analytical approach made use of the PAT methodology to fully assess the range of information available in planning the operation as well as other problem solving tools.

The Intelligence Unit was involved in examining a number of approaches and provided a variety of products that were used in planning the operation. The FiOs (Field Intelligence Officers) and LIOs (Local Intelligence Officers) collated and gathered information on the most active and prolific offenders based on the latest intelligence available within the section. This information was then used within the Intelligence Unit's ibase system to establish offending patterns (where vehicles were used in the commission of offences) and association matrices to identify criminal relationships (including vehicles). Persistent traffic offenders (repeat disqualified, drink driver, etc). This information was combined with our mapping facility to provide hotspots, geographic models, and identify current residential information for target criminals. The Unit also analysed all complaint data to identify the most deeply affected areas and created problem profiles (i.e., where vehicles were damaged, etc). All of this information was combined and culminated in an Operational Target List that was provided to all operational personnel during the project.

Community Beat and Patrol officers were also involved in analysing the data available in order to assess not only the role the police would play in the operation but also to

accurately identify the problem using their knowledge of the area, problem and offenders. They were encouraged to share information within the section as well as with the stakeholder agencies in order to improve the project's success. Officers were given information regarding complaints, offenders and vehicles and were asked to note any missing details or provide any additional information that should have been taken into consideration.

The details provided by the Council, Housing Offices and Fire Service were also collated and analysed in conjunction with police data to provide a comprehensive picture of the problem from a multi-agency approach. The road surveys were especially useful in identifying vehicles that had not come to the attention of the police through complaints or observations and allowed targets to be effectively identified and actioned. All analysis involved Intelligence Unit personnel, uniformed officers, and where possible, local agencies (in a collaborative setting). The Post Office was also instrumental in supplying data for analysis. They recorded all details from excise license sales over the operational period as well as after. These details were useful in measuring the impact (increase or decrease of licences) of the activities.

Underlying Conditions

The issue of vehicle removal and the factors influencing the abandoning of vehicles in the area was also examined. A number of characteristics were revealed that identified lack of adequate funds to both use the vehicle and/or remove it (citing low income or contempt for excise licensing), general apathy and in some instances, a willingness to use the vehicle to claim on insurance in cases of arson or criminal damage. In addition, the cost to the Council **for removing the vehicles was also contributing to the problem in that the Council was not in a position to continually remove vehicles without compensation. Other underlying issues, such as broken windows and gathering points for anti-social behaviour were also examined as part of the planning phase. The underlying factor of insufficient planning and parking facilities was also examined as a feature escalating this problem to action.**

Nature and Extent

As previously mentioned, the problem was not considered to require the immediate attention of the police because it had been endemic in the area for a period of time and did not on first glance appear to negatively impact the quality of life of local residents. It was clear that upon investigating the problem further that there were several implications affecting the quality of life of inhabitants that had not been previously envisioned:

- Potential to escalate neighbourhood disputes over parking/not licensing vehicles

- Obstruction of housing and public areas from view (i.e., preventing adults from supervising children playing in areas around the estate)
- Creation of a 'Market Place' for crime and gathering points for anti-social behaviour
- Targets of criminal damage or arson that further affected the safety of residents
- Traffic obstructions and difficulty manoeuvring on estate roads
- A large number of unroadworthy vehicles potentially used on the roads of Skelmersdale
- A large number of noticeably 'unused' vehicles available to criminals for use in the commission of offences or as targets of activity (false insurance claims)
- Identifying over 7,000 vehicles as 'unroadworthy' where approximately 25,000 vehicles are on the road and that this problem was likely to continue to escalate without due attention

All of these factors combined to increase the importance of effectively targeting the problem and achieving results.

Information Gaps

The information collected, while far-reaching, did have some missing information that was not available at the time of planning the operation. The police had never been in possession of a valid, comprehensive map indicating adopted parking bays within the sector. This was important in the fact that vehicles that were unlicensed had to be on a 'road' before police action could be taken. Until the maps were received from the Council (just prior to beginning the operation) the police were not in a position to identify which vehicles to target. Once the maps were received, the operation was modified to ensure only adopted parking bays were targeted. Further, due to the lack of early response, many of the residents stopped making complaints to the police and as such, our incident reports were lacking a full picture of the problem. While some continued to inform the Council many stopped raising the issue with any bodies and as such, our perception of the problem was hindered. To overcome our lack of complaints, we approached the Council for their records and instructed the Communication Department to record specific information when receiving calls regarding vehicles. Finally, there had never been a consistent effort to monitor unlicensed vehicles and this prevented an accurate estimate of the problem. At the time of the operation it was impossible to collect data from local scrapyards to assess the number of vehicles that were destroyed by the owners before and during our vehicles. There are a number of yards available within and outside the section that may have been used by residents, and as such, this would have been too resource intensive.

PROBLEM RESOLUTION

Choosing a Response

The reasoning behind choosing to clamp, fine and remove vehicles was due to its immediate response and high visibility, and more importantly, because the DVLA had already established a protocol and made it available to various agencies. As an over-stretched organisation, the police seized the opportunity to minimise their own resource involvement while establishing partnerships with the DVLA, Council and other local bodies to address the problem. The local Council's Abandoned Vehicle Policy had been in use for a number of years but had remained ineffective. It was also decided against visiting all streets in the area and identifying vehicles because of a lack of resources and also because with the number of void vehicles, it would have been possible to only address one estate and seize 1,000 alone. Targeting a number of locations throughout the sector proved beneficial because it increased our visibility within the community and increased public awareness of our presence and activities.

The multi-agency approach was also chosen because it was sustainable for all parties involved. The DVLA has earmarked an agent (Sureway Parking) to carry out this type of operation; the Council is willing to continue as it reduces the onus (and cost) of removing vehicles to the DVLA as well as act as an education centre informing the public of parking by-laws. The Housing Offices are continuing to be involved in monitoring the parking situation as it has an impact upon their residents and properties. The Post Office were also in a position to monitor the sales of excise licences over a long period of time which was useful in evaluating the operation's success. These parties, working in partnership with the police, form a "capable guardian" and ensured the operation would continue to reduce the number of unlicensed/abandoned vehicles. The police would operate the project to continue enforcement on a regular basis as well as provide specific targeting of offender's vehicles.

Response Design

The police adopted a problem-orientated approach due to the size of the sector and the resource limitations. Analysis indicated that vehicles, individuals, times, and locations could be targeted effectively rather than non-directed patrol. The operation was designed to focus on a number of problem areas, combine the activities of a number of agencies (namely the police, Sureway Parking and the local Council) and minimise the number of resources required to successfully achieve the objective.

Intervention Evidence

The agencies considered the removal, seizing, fining, licensing, etc of vehicles as evidence that the operation was successful. Given the large number of vehicles identified (7,000) and the geographical region involved, a set numerical target was not

established. The police and Council also took an increase of public complaints (and compliments) as evidence the operation was having an impact on the problem as it demonstrated public confidence had increased.

Ownership

The operation was owned by the police as the co-ordinating agency and was specifically 'owned' by PC Eckersley who co-ordinated the actions of the stakeholder agencies. PC Eckersley, as POP co-ordinator, was available and had been encouraged to develop a response to the issue.

Implementation

The various roles and responsibilities of the stakeholder agencies were taken into account in planning the implementation of the solution. The police were involved in directing and identifying vehicles (through patrol and analysis) and passing this information to both the Council and the DVLA agents. The DVLA were also involved in the issuing and responding to CLE 2/6 letters and the Council provided liaison between resident enquiries and the police. The Operational Order was primarily a traffic initiative from a police perspective. It involved resources from ARV, Traffic, Communications, Dog Handler, Motorbike, Community Beat and Section units. Post Office staff were directed to record information relating to the purchase of excise licences.

Police and DVLA staff were provided with the Operational Order that supplied the names, addresses, registration numbers of vehicles, an operational target list and a daily briefing was conducted prior to commencing activities (DVLA agents were provided with police radio equipment). Training was not required because DVLA staff were fully qualified in the use of equipment and techniques. The police were provided with a fact sheet outlining the powers of the DVLA agents in order to facilitate a working relationship.

Budget

While there was no real budget or cost plan for this operation, it was inexorably tied to the resources available for duty from all agencies (police, DVLA agents, Council and Housing staff, Post Office workers). A staffing rota was devised and maintained eight officers on the operation (where one could be seconded to other duties). The DVLA agents provided, on average, four staff members and equipment (one clamping unit and two removal wagons). The Council and other agencies did not provide actual resources but did handle queries and maintain communication links with the police. The primary benefit of involving the DVLA was to remove the cost from the police organisation as well as the local Council.

Problems Encountered

One of the problems encountered was a resistance from local officers at implementing the POP methodology. A small group of officers who took a 'jaundiced' view of POP as a faddish non-sense and a bureaucratic imposition. Many of these officers lacked any experience of POP in action. Through involving them in the targeting of criminals as part of the operation and in defining the problem, these officers grew to recognise the value of the approach and willingly participated. Due to the success of this operation, the number of POP initiatives increased dramatically in the following years (in the year prior to Clamp only 16 initiatives; following Clamp 44 in the year).

A further complication of removing vehicles was the lack of a secure compound within the vicinity of Skelmersdale (vehicles were impounded in Aintree, 1 Smiles away). The DVLA made two wagons available which made it possible to transport six vehicles and also permitted their employees to work extended hours to remove clamped vehicles. The DVLA also had use of a crane to lift vehicles that had been deliberately blocked from access by the owners.

A problem was also encountered with the communication network as a number of criminal elements were monitoring police communications and would move into the area and damage (superglue) clamp locks. The police and the DVLA agents were able to overcome this problem by being in possession of anti-superglue compound and also modified the recording procedure by eliminating the radio transmission of vehicle locations. The potential for individuals and offenders to move their vehicles prior to the commencement of the operation was considered a potential problem. As such, operational integrity was maintained through delaying the release of information to the press. The press was also a further area of concern when stories were published that were sympathetic to the non-licensed owner. However, the sympathetic stories were far and between and were outnumbered by positive coverage.

APPROACH SUCCESS

Achievement

The operation achieved its main objective of reducing the number of abandoned and non-licensed vehicles on the streets of Skelmersdale. Removals, ticketing, fining and clamping combined to remove more than 100 vehicles from the roads as a direct result of the operation. The total number of vehicles moved from the streets of Skelmersdale could not be quantified because many were moved by the owners to scrapyards - a fact revealed by a number of police stop checks conducted on vehicles leaving the area. This was not a direct objective but did remove unlicensed vehicles from the streets and minimised the need for invasive action. Our second measurement was increasing the number of taxed vehicles. The Post Office recorded more than 1,300 excise license purchases at various local locations and included back taxes (only 929 vehicle licenses were purchased in 2000). Reducing the number of vehicles evading licence fees was achieved through distributing more than 150 CLE 2/6 forms (the DVLA is responsible for following these enquiries and data is not available). The police were also able to monitor public perception by the number of calls providing information on vehicles that continued for at least a month after the operation. The calls demonstrated an increase in the confidence the public had in our ability to address the problem. There is also much anecdotal information supplied by the stakeholders indicating the public was satisfied and appreciative that action had finally been taken (numerous calls logged at communications and conversations with residents). During the operation, of approximately 50 targeted offenders, 30 had their vehicles removed.

One factor that has not been discussed was the revenue generated as a result of the partnership operation. The DVLA and Post Office have revealed that approximately £188,000 was generated as a result of licence fees and clamped vehicles. This is a substantial amount for the DVLA and is a factor encouraging their continued involvement in the locality.

Evaluation

The operation was evaluated according to the following items:

- Number of vehicles clamped
- Number of vehicles identified with no excise license and actioned through clamping, CLE 2/6, fines, removal
- Number of individuals purchasing excise licenses at local Post Offices
- Number of calls received to communications, Council and stakeholders
- Number of criminal vehicles targeted and seized
- Number of vehicles moved from the locality

Evaluation Members

All of the stakeholder bodies were involved in evaluating the operation. This involved conducting additional analysis after the operation to establish any changes in patterns, monitor complaints, and consider sustaining the activities on a regular basis.

Evaluation Data

The following sources of information were used as a method of evaluating the operation:

- Data collected by the DVLA (clamped vehicles, registrations, excise licenses)
- PNC records (post-operation only 5,000 vehicles were unlicensed)
- Post Office records measuring the number of sales
- A variety of police records relating to criminal activity, incident reports, etc
- Press reports relating to the activities

Unfortunately, the DVLA and Post Office only keep records for a period of 12 months before it is destroyed (given the size and amount of information collected). This has hindered the evaluation process as it is not possible to retrieve historic data.

OVERALL APPROACH

Operation Clamp has demonstrated its ability to systematically address the problem of unlicensed and abandoned vehicles on the road of Skelmersdale. The approach was devised only after a thorough examination of the problem from a variety of perspectives and valued the opinions of both the community and local agencies. The substantial increase in the number of licenses purchased and the number of removals indicated that the police had historically overlooked the problem. It was only through evaluating the situation in terms of a problem-orientated approach that an effective method of addressing the problem was created and gained the support of both operational staff and the various stakeholder agencies.

The success of Operation Clamp in Skelmersdale has been recognised as a successful targeting exercise and has already been put in place by other sectors in the division. The project has been run on two occasions with similar success. The success of the operation was also tested when it was publicised that Clamp would be starting again on the local radio and press but was not actually carried out by the police. During this period there was an increase in a number of licenses being purchased and a number of vehicles were lawfully removed by the owners.

While the police only run the operation from time to time, the partnership that exists between the stakeholders is firmly in place and has facilitated the communication lines between the DVLA and the local Council on a regular basis to address problem areas as they arise. The number of complaints registered in 2001 are lower than the previous years demonstrates that the partnership approach is continuing to address the problem without direct police intervention.

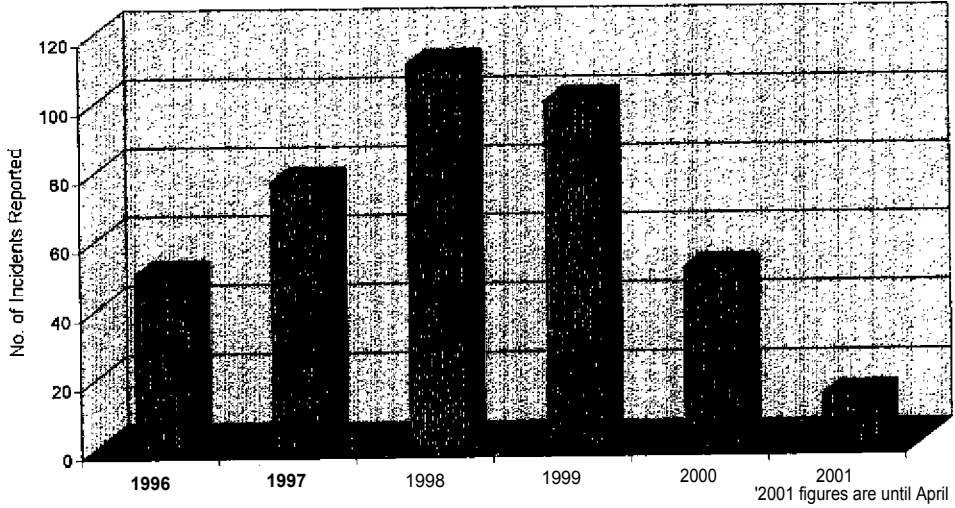
*Note: With recent changes in recycling legislation requiring the recycling of additional vehicle components (including all fluids, oil, antifreeze, etc) this type of operation will become increasingly important as the cost of destroying vehicles may rise and subsequently increase the number of vehicles abandoned on road networks.

APPENDICES

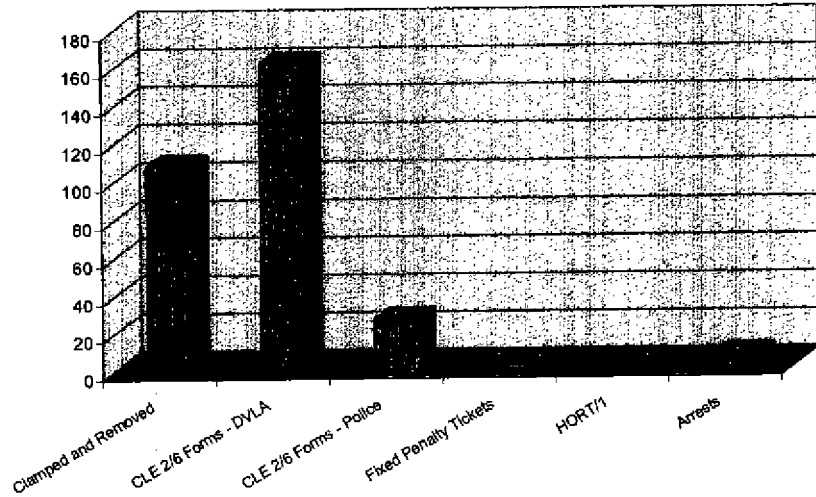
Appendix A: **Graphs Relating to:
Incidents Reported to the Police
Operation Clamp Activities**

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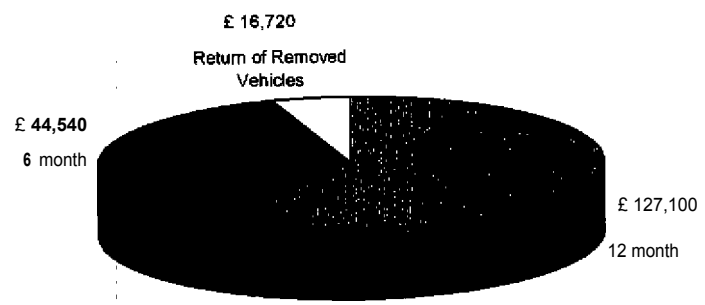
Incidents Reported to the Police (for no Excise Licenser



Operation Clamp Activities



Revenue Generated



Total Revenue Generated as a Result of Operation Clamp: £ 188,360

