Problem Solving Quarterly

Downtown Cruising in Boise

Boise, Idaho — In recent years, Boise city officials have attempted to revitalize business opportunities in the city's core. The ongoing beautification efforts have prompted citizens to express concerns about young people parking and cruising downtown on Friday and Saturday nights. The problem usually occurs after 9 p.m., and is most obvious on warm evenings.

Traditionally, cruising is considered a great American teenage past time. In Boise, however, cruising-related reports ranged from citizen harassment, vandalism, and underage **drinking,** to littering and urinating in public. Windows have been broken and empty business parking lots littered.

The Boise Police Department initially responded by increasing downtown patrols on the weekends **and** during warm weather. While enforcement did not stop the cruising in the area, it did provide greater control of the problems associated with cruising.

But budget limitations soon made it difficult to sustain the higher level of enforcement in the down town area, and by the summer of 1988, the police sought to develop a program to minimize the cruising problem.

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In July 1988, the Planning Unit of the police department conducted a nationwide survey of police departments to solicit strategies other cities have developed to deal with cruising. The 229 departments that responded provided the Boise Police Department and City Council with diverse solutions to the cruising problem. Following a public hearing on the issue, Boise **Mayor Dirk Kempthorne** appointed a task force to consider

Gasoline Drive-Offs Steer Policing Efforts

St. Petersburg Florida -w Each month, the Economic Crimes Unit of the St. Petersburg, Florida, Police Department handles **approximately** 45 gas drive-offs (customers fill their tanks with gas and drive off without paying) at area convenience stores and gas stations. The estimated total economic loss is $564 per month and approximately 80 hours per month are spent recording, reporting and investigating these crimes.

Prosecution rarely evolves from investigations because attendants do not obtain license numbers and cannot positively identify suspects. In cases when the license number is obtained, the tag has often been changed or the vehicle is sold. Even when a license plate is identified, it is rarely registered to a vehicle owned by the suspect.

Sergeant Mary Ann Donohue of the Economic Crimes Unit

Cruising, continued

the problem and propose solutions. The task force included business people, cruisers, law enforcement personnel, and juvenile probation officers.

Issues of Concern

The task force identified several issues relating to the cruising problem. Cruisers noted that there were few social activities in Boise, especially for those too young to patronize bars. Downtown business people expressed concern over costly vandalism and litter, as well as the disturbing noise generated by cruising. Citizens said they were hesitant to venture into the downtown area due to the intimidating behavior of some cruisers.

Recommendations

After the Report of the Mayor's Task Force on Cruising was released, work began to carry out some of the recommendations. To date, the

following policies have been wholly or partially implemented.

•   A police storefront substation was set up in a former bank in a location right in the heart of the cruise area. Officers working the cruise area bring offending juveniles in custody to the substation and then release them to their parents or guardian. The substation has been well received by officers and citizens alike. Citizens readily stop in for information or to file reports. Officers use the facility for telephone calls or report writing **rather than returning** to the main facility. The only problem cited with the substation is that funding levels limit its operation to Friday and Saturday evenings.

The process of tackling the cruising problem reinforced the concept that cruising, like other law enforcement problems, is not solely a police problem but a community concern.

•   The Boise City Council approved a $50,000 consulting fee to conduct an analysis of the noise problem in Boise and to develop a comprehensive noise ordinance. The Police Department is directly involved with the consultant in the development of the ordinance.

• A private firm has contracted with the Downtown Boise Association to oversee individuals sentenced to community service. Most of this activity will center on the beautification of the

downtown area. Police department staff members will serve in a facilitator role.

•   The Crime Prevention Unit, in conjunction with officers who work the cruise area, developed a list of recommendations for lighting improvements.

•   A juvenile offense citation was developed to improve officer efficiency by allowing officers to cite juveniles for minor offenses rather than physically detaining them.

• The local YMCA **and** YWCA have sponsored youth dances and other activities during cruising hours. Private efforts to develop alternative activities for youths are underway, and the police department is encouraging other community groups to become involved in youth activities.

Final Thoughts

The process of tackling the cruising problem reinforced the concept that cruising, like other law enforcement problems, is not solely a police problem but a community concern. While the results of the task force's recommendations are **inconclusive,** the cooperation and partnership that stemmed from this community effort was deemed a success. City officials, law enforcement personnel and members of the community were encouraged by the initial outcome of the cruising project and look forward to tackling future city concerns with the same problem-oriented **approach.**

For more information, **contact Lieutenant Jim Spears or Lieutenant Mike Worley** at (208) 377-6670.

conducted a six-month study to determine the underlying conditions of these drive-off incidents. Donohue found that heavily victimized establishments had common characteristics. These establishments specialized in food service facilities, had a large number of gas pumps available to the public, had less than three attendants or clerks, provided no garage service, and did not have **a** pre-pay policy during hours of heaviest losses.

Educating the Retailers

To learn more about the problem, **Donohue conducted** an informal telephone survey of stores that were not heavily victimized. She learned that clerks in stores without food sales do not have additional distractions and are more aware of gas pump activity. Retailers with fewer gas pumps reported that the pumps tend to be centrally located, which makes them easier to monitor. A greater number of clerks also enhances the monitoring capabilities of the establishment, and garage service provides additional security because attendants are **highly** visible. Most importantly, Donohue learned that pre-paying drastically reduces drive-off incidents.

Donohue spoke to victim retailers in an attempt to educate them in preventive measures, primarily encouraging them to make changes which would enable more vigilant watch of gas pumps. Donohue met with strong opposition. Retailers opposed a pre-pay policy because they felt it was an **inconvenience** to the customer. Since patrons often do not know how much gas is needed, they have to stand in line twice. Moreover, retailers anticipated a

loss in both food **and** gasoline sales, predicting that the inconvenience would drive patrons elsewhere. They also thought gas sales would decline because patrons pay a specific amount instead of filling up, and food sales would drop because if patrons pre-pay, they do not receive change with which to make spontaneous food purchases.

Retailers continue to look to the police and the courts to provide a remedy, but refuse to take action that would protect themselves from future incidents.

Donohue found that retailers do not want to protect themselves because preventative measures are costly. Retailers continue to look to the police and the courts to provide **a** remedy, but refuse to take action that would protect themselves from future incidents. In many cases, retailers benefit from both police and **insurance** recovery without incurring **financial** responsibility themselves. The police provide security **and respond** to crimes **that** are a direct result of the retailer's practices, and the insurance company subsidizes any losses that result from these crimes.

In order to research her hypothesis that the pre-pay method would decrease drive-offs, Donohue found six retailers who were willing to document monthly **food and gas sales data. Donohue** planned first to determine the norm for food and gas sales and, after implementing an experimental pre-pay policy for two months, she would compare

results. Unfortunately, after the initial step of recording the data, none of the retailers were willing to risk the temporary change to a prepay policy.

Despite lack of cooperation on the part of retailers, Donohue sought to institute a police department policy requesting gasoline dealers to obtain payment in advance. According to the proposed policy, if cash or a credit card is not secured prior to the sale, the police department would not respond to investigate the theft. **Donohue submitted** a **memorandum** to the chief of police underlining her recommendations, but the proposal was rejected because of conflicts with current administrative policy.

Plan B

Undaunted, Donohue pursued another method of reducing reported drive-offs by making use of the Offense Reports Officers (ORO) Unit. The ORO Unit would continue to handle drive-off reports by phone, but those victims requesting **prosecution must make the report in person at headquarters. Donohue theorized** that the **number of hours needed to investigate drive-offs would be** reduced, as well as the caseload. A follow-up review revealed, however, that because reporting had become easier for merchants, the total number of reports has **actually** increased.

Not all problem solving efforts result in immediate solutions. Donohue's methodology **and** persistency, however, is an example of the spirit of problem-oriented policing.

For more information, contact **Sergeant Mary Ann Donohue** Department, at (813) 893-7096.

Waging the War on Drugs Through POP

Albany, *New York* - If passed, state Senate Bill 8606 would use problem-solving techniques to supplement the efforts of local governments in reducing drug-related and other crime.

The drug epidemic in New York is a many-faceted problem of health, education, housing, family disintegration, poverty, and other factors. With the introduction of S. 8606, state legislators have acknowledged that the traditional policing methods of arrest and formal adjudication of those involved in drug sales are merely "band-aids" and do not address the. underlying problems that cause drug incidents,

The b would create a crime reduction program to oversee the problem-soling approach to drug-related Grime. it would also fund projects to coordinate law enforcement with citizen's groups and develop information sources for problem identification at the neighborhood level. Implementation of training programs, development of neighborhood safety assessments, and evaluation of effectiveness of problem-solving strategies are additional requirements of this legislative measure.

Over $6 million wall be appropriated from the federal anti-drug abuse account to finance this initiative. 'hose interested in Supporting the bill or in learning more about it should write Or call

Difficulties in Measuring Effectiveness In Problem-Oriented Policing

By John Eck

Three pitfalls are prevalent when police go about measuring problem-solving effectiveness. The first is the Alligator Dilemma, or measuring the means of policing instead of the ends; the second is the Titanic Mistake, or establishing unaccessible goals while overlooking small tangible victories; and the third is the Ginzu Knife Ultimatum, or establishing unitary, agency-wide measures instead of seeking out a variety of performance measures.

The Alligator Dilemma

When you're up to your elbows in alligators, it's hard to remember that your goal was to **drain the swamp. Though** focusing on the ends of police work — addressing problems — forms the basis of problem-oriented policing, determining how well an officer, unit or agency is performing is difficult. There will be a constant temptation to see the means for addressing problems as the highest priority. We see this most obviously when people discuss their new policing strategy in terms of how officers get around (foot patrol), where they are based (mini-stations), and how **they** are **managed** (democratic **management styles), instead** of **what they are accomplishing on the** street.

Recently, a police chief beginning to implement a community policing strategy stated that his officers will be required to complete monthly reports counting the number of residents they talk to, street lights replaced, community meetings attended, abandoned cars towed and crack houses boarded. Though each of the activities being counted can be very useful, such a performance measurement scheme reveals nothing about how well problems were addressed; counting the number of alligators wrestled says nothing about the conditions of the swamp. Furthermore, it reinforces the primacy of means over ends.

The Titanic Mistake

Are we just rearranging the deck chairs? Focusing on the ends of policing can often lead to difficulties if the ends are unachievable. The police currently suffer from the "Superman Syndrome" because many people believe that the police can reduce crime and that this is the goal of policing. This unrealistic goal not only creates a constant public relations nightmare, but is also responsible for much of the isolation of the police from the public. Police cannot explain to the public the reality of their work for fear of violating the public's expectations, and the public's unrealistic demands result in frustration for both parties when they are not achieved.

Recently, some commentators have asserted that, even if the **police cannot control** crime, they *can* reduce fear of crime and **save neighborhoods.** One should be concerned about the ability of police to achieve

these goals. Are we **substituting** one set of unrealistic goals for another set? What will happen if the public and their elected officials ever come to believe that the police are responsible for stabilizing the social and economic viability of their neighborhoods?

This is not to say that the police should not be concerned about neighborhood viability, fear, crime or other concerns. Police must be. Police can and should address specific fear problems, neighborhood safety concerns, and crime patterns. But as a broad, city-wide, undifferentiated goal, these concerns cannot be addressed by the police.

The Ginzu Knife Ultimatum

"One tool for all your needs. It slices. It dices..." Police work is about addressing diverse problems, even if many problems have no impact on the city's crime rate or neighborhood viability. No single measure of performance (such as the crime rate) will ever adequately portray police performance. Will citizen satisfaction surveys reveal how well police treat non-resident workers and tourists? If the police intervene to prevent racial violence, can they reasonably expect everyone to think well of them? Will finding a better way of addressing problems of child abuse improve police performance as measured by surveys of citizens' fears of crime? Will we end up replacing response time performance with public satisfaction ratings?

I am not **arguing** that crime statistics are useless or that surveys of citizens' opinions and feelings are meaningless; they are important indicators that can be put to good use. **But** they reveal very little about police effectiveness unless they are directly linked to how the police **handle** specific problems.

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Herman Goldstein, University of Wisonsin law professor, expressed the need for a problem-oriented approach to policing because he recognized that the police, like most **bureaucracies,** are disproportionately concerned with managerial and administrative concerns to the detriment of substance. It *is his* simple notion — that we must focus first and foremost on the end results of police work — that separates problem-oriented policing from other policing strategies. The ends of policing are coping with the myriad problems that the public expects the police to handle.

Measuring the effectiveness of police work therefore involves assessing the impact of police problem-solving efforts on many different problems. This is a complex undertaking for four reasons: the conflict over problem definitions, the diversity of goals, the need for collaboration, and the variety of measures.

Defining Problems

Objective assessment of police effectiveness is difficult because police **have** a great deal of control over how a problem is defined. The police definition of a problem may not be the same as the definition of the people who are most concerned about it (and these people may disagree among themselves as to what the problem is). Further, not all members of the public will have equal say in problem definition. For example, a major local employer will have a much greater influence on gaining policing attention for a problem than will a homeless man living in a park. How a problem gets defined will determine the goals for solving the problem, who will be involved in forming the solution, and the measures of effectiveness to be employed.

To the extent that the police department only addresses problems that have a great deal of support **and** a low potential for conflict, the police will appear to be **doing** a **very good** job while they **overlook** serious **community** concerns. In short, no less than traditional **incident-driven policing,** problem-oriented policing gives officers and **administrators the capacity to** manipulate public opinion about the police and to serve some segments of society more than others. Acknowledging this fact does not undermine the merits of adopting a problem-oriented approach — any improvement in policing has this difficulty **and** only a well-informed electorate can effectively **guard against** it. **By recognizing this possibility police** executives and other local officials can work to assure that public perceptions of problems are given a fair and honest hearing by members of the police department.

Goals

A second difficulty is that the objectives of **problem-solving efforts vary, even among problems**

Environmental Surveys Prove Valuable Tools

By Nancy G. La Vigne

In 1988, the Tulsa Police Department conducted a Drug-Problem Inventory under the auspices of the Bureau of Justice Assistance and the Police Executive Research Forum. Upon researching the nature of the drug problem in Tulsa, officers recognized that four public housing complexes had a very high number of drug arrests. Trained in problem-oriented policing, foot patrol officers conducted environmental surveys in these four complexes to measure the amount of deterioration, graffiti, litter, and overall lack of good maintenance. The officers noted a direct correlation between the degree of environmental decay and the number of drug-related calls for service.

This relationship between the physical environment and the amount of crime which occurs points to the value of conducting environmental surveys. **Environmental surveys can be** used in a number of ways to tackle law enforcement problems. They can help analyze the nature of a series of criminal incidents; identify emerging problems; and measure the effectiveness of problem-solving approaches. In problem-solving terms, the environment is both physical, relating to the condition of buildings and landscaping, and social, referring to the behaviors, attitudes and sentiments of residents. Quantifying the physical and social characteristics of a neighborhood is valuable because the environment has an important influence on whether or not a crime takes place.

Broken Windows

In 1982, James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling published an article in *The Atlantic* (March 1982) that illustrated how the physical environment of a neighborhood sends a message to would-be criminals that their trade will either be tolerated or resisted. Using the example of a broken window, Wilson and Kelling argue that if the window is not replaced, more windows will soon be shattered. The message to vandals is that destruction is tolerated: graffiti appears on public property, undesirables begin to congregate on street corners.

More recently, Wesley Skogan (1987) substantiated these claims when he studied the social and economic stability of 40 neighborhoods in six cities. Interviewing over 13,000 residents, Skogan found that disorder, as characterized by social and economic instability, was related to: 1) less frequent social interaction and fewer efforts at household crime prevention; 2) perceived problems of crime, risk of victimization and fear; and 3) lower levels of neighborhood satisfaction and a desire to more out of the neighborhood. This level of disorder, Skogan found, was related to the high level of social problems in the neighborhood, such as public drinking, loitering teenagers, drug use, and vandalism. [Ed. note: A recent publication by Skogan, Disorder and Decline, provides a thorough examination of the relationship between disorder, community sentiments of fear, and the level of crime.]

20. a.　　　　Number of overhead street lights
　　b.　　　　Number of broken overhead lights
　　c.　　　　Number of **abandoned (non-drivable)** autos on block (look for absence of tags. missing tires, shattered windows)

21. **Parking** Lot
　　a.　　　　Is there a parking lot for the store?
If yes,
　　b.　_ How many spaces in parking lot?
　　c.　　　How many street exits?
　　d.　Where is the **parking** lot located?
　　　　1, ＿ adjacent to store
　　　　2. ＿ **behind** store
　　　　3.　　in front of store
　　c.　Is parking lot in view of
　　　　1.　　register?
　　　　2. _ windows?
　　　　3.　　front door?

　　　　How many cars parked in lot?
　　　　How **brightly** lit is the parking lot? (use light meter)

Selected questions from an environmental survey

Domino Effect

Social problems of disorder such as loitering and graffiti are not serious offenses, but they nonetheless raise the level of fear in the neighborhood. People no longer feel comfortable strolling the streets after dark, enabling drug dealers to attend to their business without being observed. Soon, the neighborhood has completely deteriorated and the police do not know where to begin in addressing the extensive and diverse incidents of crime that result. Like a domino effect, the initial results of the environmental deterioration lead to a greater number of more serious offenses.

Systematic Approach

While the police officer trained in problem-oriented **policing** can collect **information** by simply jotting down what she **knows about** a **high** drug-use area

and talking to residents and merchants in the neighborhood, the use of surveys is both more systematic and objective. Surveys can produce empirical evidence and bring together factors that may initially appear unrelated. They can point to information about the surroundings of a high crime area, such as the amount of litter and graffiti, which may be an indicator that more serious criminal offenses are going on. Abandoned houses, for example, are more than eyesores; they can serve as havens for drug users **and** dealers.

In addition to identifying and analyzing crime problems, environmental survey data can be compared to data collected from community surveys and calls for service and used to test for changes in the environment before and after police or community **intervention.** In the 1970s, the Hartford (CT) Police Department **conducted** a **three-pronged approach that** included: 1) making changes in the physical environment; 2) making changes in the delivery of police services; and 3) organizing the residents to improve their own neighborhoods. **Environmental** surveys conducted both before and after the changes were implemented enabled the police to evaluate the effectiveness of their measures. Police noted an increased use of the neighborhood by residents, increased stranger recognition, a decrease in resident fear and concern about crime, and a drop in the number of burglaries.

Interagency Cooperation

The diverse uses of **environmental surveys undoubtedly** make them useful tools to tackle **problem-solving** measures. Yet **developing and designing an environmental survey instrument is a time-consuming and detail-oriented undertaking.** While a discussion of

that are similar in most other ways. Officers can have any of at least five objectives for a specific effort: 1) elimination of the problem; 2) reduction in the number of incidents stemming from the problem; 3) reduction in the harm from each incident; 4) improvement of services to people suffering from the problem; or 5) coordination with another agency to assume responsibility for addressing the problem.

Depending on the characteristics of a problem, one or more of these objectives may be valid for assessing outcomes. As a consequence, the objectives of each problem-solving effort will have to be accounted for in assessing agency performance.

Measures

Just as problem-solving objectives differ widely, so will outcome measures; a simple city- or county-wide measure, such as measuring crime rates, is inappropriate. For example, a problem-solving effort directed at concerns about vagrants scaring customers in a strip shopping center might be evaluated by looking at the volume of sales at the stores before and after the effort. This approach, however, would be an **inappropriate** method for measuring the effectiveness of a problem- solving effort directed at **countering** drug sales in an apartment complex. So any system for measuring performance will have to take into account an infinite variety of **ways of documenting** effectiveness.

Collaboration

Because police officers addressing problems will have to

depend on many community members and agencies to supply information and carry out their agreed upon roles, the resolution of problems is only, in part, reliant on the actions of members of the police **department.** An officer may do everything within his or her power to bring about the successful resolution of a dispute, but find that the dispute continues because of the failure of others to take necessary actions. Therefore, police agencies must be able to determine if their members have done what is required to address problems, regardless of the ultimate outcomes.

To Sum Up

A useful and honest police effectiveness measurement scheme will have to have three characteristics. First, it must focus on the quality of specific problem **handling** efforts. Second, it must allow for the fact that different problem-solving efforts will have different objectives and different measures of effectiveness. Finally, it must recognize that the police are not acting alone, but are dependent on the actions of citizens and other public agencies. The utility of this measurement system is **dependent on how well the police balance the diverse and often conflicting demands of its** constituency. If members of the public feel that they have access to the police and the police listen and take their concerns into account, they are more likely to have greater faith in police **efforts and to believe the results of the measurement scheme.**

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survey design and coding procedures is beyond the scope of this article, it is important to emphasize the need for interagency collaboration. Each and every step of the survey process can — and should — be taken with the help of community groups and the local government. Encouraging the involvement and cooperation of residents will emphasize that the police department is an integral part of the community with a vested interest in addressing the persistent, underlying problems that may be linked to crime in the neighborhood.

Nancy La Vigne is a research fellow at PERF and is pursuing her Master's degree at the LB. School of Public Affairs.

Problem-Oriented Policing Conference

It's *not too* late *to register for the first national conference on Problem-Oriented* Policing *to* be held *in* **San** Diego *on* November 7 - 9, 1990,

Hosted by the San Diego Police Department and the Police *Executive* Research *Forum and* sponsored *in* part by *the* Bureau *of Justice Assistance, the conference is designed for* police *of* all *ranks* who *want to expand their knowledge* about problem-oriented policing.

Participants will learn about the most recent research and strategies on substantive problem topics, from dealing with repeat offenders and tackling drug sales in public housing to measuring the effectiveness of problem-solving efforts and starting problem-solving training programs.

Registration fee is $150.00 *per* participant *and* hotel accommodations are $67.00/night at the Doubletree Hotel in San Diego.

Call the Police Executive Research Forum fora registration form. Registration is *limited* - **call** *now at (202) 466-7820.*