

How a Think Tank Fights Crime

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According to a 1994 General Social Survey, 47 percent of the U.S. population was afraid to walk alone at night in their own neighborhoods. Citizens and even the police themselves assumed that law enforcement could not actually reduce crime. All too often, the focus of police administrators was on running a clean agency, staying away from scandal, and handling budget and personnel problems. Those are important concerns, of course, but they do not in themselves make the streets any safer.

Thus citizens and police alike came to view the role of a police officer as that of an efficient record-keeper, documenting crimes that have already happened, and occasionally pursuing a known offender.

To get the focus back on actually reducing crime, Hudson Institute began an innovative program that made crime prevention the *primary* mission of a police department. This program used the modern police department's unprecedented record-keeping capability to draw a detailed picture of crime in the community.

Data was analyzed on three levels: from a single address, to a neighborhood, and eventually an entire city, to identify incentives for, and patterns of, criminal activity. The net result: crime became predictable; police could prevent it; and citizens could feel safe again.

In 1994, Hudson Institute and the Indianapolis Police Department (IPD) formed a unique partnership, the only such relationship between an independent public-policy organization and a major urban police department. The Crime Control Policy Center comprised Hudson Adjunct Fellows Alex Weiss, Chief Criminologist for the City of Indianapolis, and Ed McGarrell, Director of the Crime Control Policy Center, and Hudson researchers Kelley Gaffney and Natalie Kroovand. Gaffney and Kroovand worked as district criminologists on-site at the four IPD district offices, analyzing crime data to identify hotspots within the city. This information was distributed to IPD command staff and line-level officers. Then Gaffney and Kroovand assessed the effectiveness of the intervention.

This unusual partnership worked with citizens, business groups, and other local constituencies to identify crime-prone areas, assess disorder problems, and establish deterrents.

Targeting the "Hotspots"

The first step was identifying "hotspots"--locations that generate a disproportionate number of calls to police. Research shows that 3 percent of the locations in a city can be responsible for 50 percent of these calls. By identifying opportunities for criminal activity, police can reduce crime.

Two examples show how this process works. The district criminologists identified a Southside Indianapolis motel and a Northside fast-food restaurant as hotspots. Each establishment regularly appeared on monthly lists of the most common locations for calls for police services. Both sites frequently reported drug sales, public intoxication, prostitution, assaults, and robberies. With these sites singled out for action, district officers and community prosecutors worked with business owners, residents, and neighborhood associations to develop deterrents to crime. These included installation of lighting and fencing, hiring of private security at high-crime times, and removal of pay phones used for drug dealing and prostitution. Subsequent analyses revealed a significant decline in calls for service. Indeed, both sites eventually were removed from the list of district hotspots, thus freeing officers to focus on other problem locations.

Holding Police Accountable

The Hudson-IPD partnership also established a program known as the Indianapolis Management Accountability Program (IMAP). This effort involved a weekly district-by-district review of crime patterns and police strategies by top command staff, Weiss, and McGarrell.

The IMAP program served several functions. It clearly established the reduction of crime and disorder as the focus of attention within the police department. The meetings also promoted the exchange of ideas about various responses to crime and concrete data on their effectiveness. Members from all districts attended

these meetings and carried novel and effective strategies back to the various districts. These meetings also improved morale, by providing a means of identifying and rewarding successes. Moreover, the meetings promoted accountability. Once a hotspot in a district was targeted, the deputy chief knew he had to report whether or not the problem was alleviated.

Evaluation of Specific Efforts

The Crime Control Policy Center also evaluated specific crime-control strategies. IPD's Safe Streets project, for example, increased police patrols in high-crime neighborhoods, and preliminary findings indicated a significant drop in auto theft and some impact on robbery rates.

Another method of combating crime is directed patrol. Increased patrols to high-crime areas (geographically larger than hotspots) reduce the need to respond to calls from that area. An officer on directed patrol makes frequent traffic stops and investigates suspicious persons on his own, rather than in response to a complaint.

The IPD, through its partnership with Hudson Institute, emerged as a model for future police department administration. The Sagamore Institute will continue to share the lessons of this experience with other communities throughout the United States.