

# Problem Solving Quarterly

A NEWSLETTER OF THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM

## Problem Solving in Practice #1

### "WARNING: DO NOT ENTER"

#### Description of Problem

In 1984, 245 robberies were committed in Newport News. Nearly one fifth of these were committed within the small downtown area of District 1. This same area experienced a long-term and highly visible prostitution problem. The police response to these problems had been fairly routine; occasionally, officers in plain clothes would act as decoys to catch prostitutes or their customers, but for the most part the prostitutes were tolerated as a nuisance. The response to robberies was equally routine — officers generally just took reports.

A vice unit undercover operation conducted in 1984 to stamp out prostitution resulted in eight arrests and convictions, but Off. J.W. Boswell (the officer assigned to the problem) was frustrated and dismayed to discover that arrested prostitutes were typically back at work in less than one month. This frustration increased Boswell's determination to tackle the problem head-on.

Boswell used the department's crime analysis unit to obtain incident reports for all robberies of persons committed downtown between 1982 and 1984. Other sources of information included Vice, field interviews, offense reports, the Commonwealth Attorney's Office, arrest and sentencing records and the city's Codes Compliance Office. The relationship between prostitution and street robberies was suspected, but unproven. It was known, however, that many of the prostitutes were addicts who supported their habits through prostitution. It was also suspected that some turned to robbery or larceny to supplement their income.

#### Response

Boswell's first response to the problem was to convince Vice to conduct another undercover operation aimed at arresting prostitutes for solicitation. Eight more arrests were made and eight more convictions were obtained. Although this tactic was successful, Boswell felt it could be used only occasionally. He then decided to begin collecting information to develop a more effective and orderly approach to the problem. During a two-week period, he interviewed twenty-eight known or suspected prostitutes. Although the interviews provided him with much new information, he realized that he needed the assistance of

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**Problem Solving** (Quarterly, published by the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) under the auspice of the National Institute of Justice) seeks to foster exchanges of information and experiences regarding problem-oriented policing. The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of PERF or NIJ. Please submit articles, ideas and suggestions to Diane Hill, Editor, 234 M Street, N.W., Suite 910, Washington, DC 20037.

other criminal justice agencies in order to effectively address the problem.

Boswell then met with the Assistant Commonwealth Attorney and asked him to serve as the liaison to the department. The attorney agreed and together they created a plan for reducing downtown prostitution.

First, the Assistant Commonwealth Attorney promised to ask the court for twelve-month sentences in prostitution cases, rather than the usual 15-day suspended sentences. Under Virginia law, a judge can suspend all or part of a sentence, as well as place conditions on the convicted person during this suspension period. If evidence is presented to the judge showing a violation of the conditions, the judge can reimpose the entire suspended sentence. The Assistant Commonwealth Attorney agreed to ask the judge to require convicted prostitutes to serve only two months in jail and suspend the remaining ten months.

Second, the prosecutor proposed that convicted prostitutes be placed under stricter conditions during their suspension period. For example, under the new rules, convicted prostitutes were not to be seen along Washington Avenue between 25th and 50th streets and they were not to solicit in other areas of the city.

Third, Boswell promised that the police would vigorously enforce these conditions. If a police officer found a prostitute violating the conditions, the officer would inform the prosecutor, who would then request the court to subpoena the violating prostitute. The prostitute would have to appear in court to explain his or her presence in the restricted area. The court could then require the prostitute to serve the remainder of the jail sentence.

The District Court Judge supported this approach, particularly after reviewing Boswell's findings that a positive link between robbery and prostitution existed. The judge agreed to impose longer sentences, and to issue and enforce the suspension conditions. To ensure that the convicted prostitutes did not remain in the area, he and his fellow judges agreed to supply the prostitutes with city maps upon sentencing.

Two other anti-prostitution strategies involving the Navy and Codes Compliance were proposed and implemented by the Newport News Police Department. Officers began conducting orientations for Navy personnel on the hazards of prostitu-

tion, the probability of arrest and the possibility of contracting a sexually transmitted disease. Codes Compliance began inspecting and citing violations of suspected brothels.

## Results

In January 1985, Boswell had identified 28 prostitutes working in District 1. Six months later, he was able to locate six, a reduction of 79 percent. Interviews with local merchants and police observations supported Boswell's findings. Robberies had also been reduced. A time series analysis conducted by PERF staff indicated that the number of personal robberies committed downtown had been reduced by 43 percent.

(The description of this problem was taken from **Problem Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News**, published by the Police Executive Research Forum. For more information, contact Off. J.W. Boswell, Newport News Police Department, (804) 247-8637.)

## POP TALK

- "Problem-oriented policing accepts the reality that every day police work goes far beyond crime in the pure sense, and that the range of tools we have at our disposal goes far beyond law enforcement. Supt. Chris Braiden, Edmonton Police Department, Canada
- "There has to be a way of getting rid of the problem once and for all." Sgt. James Hogan, Newport News (VA) Police Department
- "It is sufficient...simply to acknowledge that the police job requires a person to deal with a wide range of behavioral and social problems that arise in a community—and that the end product of policing consists of dealing with these problems." ----Prof. Herman Goldstein, University of Wisconsin Law School

# STAFF NOTES

## First Issue of 'Problem Solving Quarterly'

Your continued interest in problem-oriented policing issues as well as your identification of the need and desire to exchange information about your problem solving efforts have resulted in the publication of this newsletter by the Police Executive Research Forum. Over the next months you can expect to receive newsletters which will highlight community/crime problems being addressed in particular departments across the country, effective solutions that have been developed to combat those problems and difficulties/successes in implementing problem-oriented policing.

Each newsletter will generally include these features:

- Descriptions of actual problems, responses and results
- "Point of Fact" (some aspect of the mechanics of problem solving)

- "You Want to Know" (highlight of questions/answers regarding problem-oriented policing)
- "Helpful Hints" (recommendations from you on implementing problem-oriented policing)
- Staff Notes
- Announcements
- Related Publications

Most of the information to be included will have to come from you. Periodically, I will be calling on you to submit news. If I haven't called, and you have something of interest to share, call me. (See also p. 6.)

Not only will the success stories be highlighted, but the negative and frustrating experiences will be reported as well. Your difficulties can earmark potential difficulties for other departments and your frustrations may pinpoint areas police managers need to address in order to effectively implement problem-oriented policing in their departments. Submit news to Diane Hill at PERF, 2300 M Street, N.W., Suite 910, Washington, DC 20037, or call (202) 466-7820.

## PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING FOCUSES ON DRUGS

A special application of the theories and tools of problem-oriented policing will take place under a new project administered by the Police Executive Research Forum. The "Problem-Oriented Approach to Drug Enforcement," a pilot project, will specifically target drug problems in four U.S. cities.

This 13-week of justice Assistance-funded project is currently underway. Sites are being selected from a pool of 11 applicants. Once selected, sites will establish a task force to develop a "drug problem inventory," describing the variety and nature of the city's drug problems by locality. The task force will represent a broad cross section of the department and will work with community and local officials to develop the drug inventory. These in-

ventories will be used by street patrol officers and supervisors to analyze and resolve the problems.

One important dimension of this project is the interactive exchange of information about drug problems and solutions. Project participants will utilize a computer communications network, METAPOL, to facilitate communications. Another important aspect of the project is the compilation of innovative and effective policing methods with respect to drug enforcement. We would greatly appreciate any such information of which you may be aware (contact John Eck or Deborah Weisel.)

In our next problem solving newsletter, we'll bring you up to date on the progress of this project. Stay tuned!

# YOU WANT TO KNOW

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**Q.** WHEN DO OFFICERS GET THE TIME NECESSARY TO COLLECT THE INFORMATION THEY NEED ABOUT PARTICULAR PROBLEMS?

**A.** "During slack duty periods. These periods exist for every officer regardless of assignment and can be identified through calls for service/time spent reports. Every officer has 2 or 3 hours a week available for problem solving."

**Sgt. J. L. Hogan**  
Newport News, VA  
(804) 874-3330

**A.** "Sometimes an officer may need to spend a few hours on another shift in order to gather information, interview participants, or complete some other facet of a project. As administrators, we need to understand that this is a necessary part of the concept [of problem-oriented policing]. If you truly believe (as I do) in solving a longstanding problem so that future police responses are no longer necessary, then a few extra hours now are well worth the results."

**Captain J. C. Harrison**  
Newport News, VA  
(804) 874-3330

**A.** "I do most of my work on the problem during my regularly scheduled work hours. In actuality, it only takes a few minutes to check on the

progress of a problem. If I can't go by a particular place, I'll call on the phone."

**Off. C. A. Bell**  
Newport News, Va  
(804) 874-3330

**A.** "This is extra work and must be thought of as such by an officer's supervisor. In other words, it is going to take time between calls. I think the key is a supervisor who will help you find the time [to use the problem-oriented approach], by not having too many officers working on models at the same time and by taking the attitude that [problem-oriented policing] is an extra effort."

**Officer T. Auby**  
Newport News, VA  
(804) 874-3330

**A.** "Since officers seldom have control over calls for service received by the police, the best way for them to get the time they need is to maintain a good working relationship with their immediate supervisor."

Keeping supervisors abreast of problem-oriented policing activities as well as the amount of time needed to gather information, aids them in coordinating manpower requirements and eliminates surprises that may foster negative attitudes toward the program.

If the supervisors know the complexity of the problem and have a good estimate of the time needed, they should schedule accordingly and maintain a proper flow of information throughout the chain of command."

**Lt. J. K. Tucker**  
Portsmouth, VA  
(804) 397-8054.



## POINT OF FACT

Problem-oriented policing is a departmental-wide strategy aimed at solving persistent community crime related problems. Police identify, analyze and respond to the underlying conditions that create incidents

# HELPFUL HINTS

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**"Once the problem-oriented policing** coordinator has formed an advisory committee or task force to assist in implementing the program, I feel the most important use of these personnel is to [have them] create a directory of city services. In many localities, a booklet is published by community service organizations that lists the many helpful agencies; however, few cities seem to have internalized this. Since no one seems to be fully aware of everything the city government can do for them, this directory becomes an important document that may be used in problem resolution or simply in enhancing a department's image."

**Lt. J. K. Tucker**  
Portsmouth, VA  
(804) 393-8054

**"I feel that when** the model is presented, it sounds too complicated and too complex to understand. The only way to understand the model is to use it. And it's not going to be used while negative attitudes exist within the upper management of the department."

**Oft C. A. Bell**  
Newport News, VA  
(804) 874-3330

**"Problem-oriented policing cannot** approach even one iota of success without each member of the department being totally assured that application of the concept is both supported and expected, from the very top level of supervision to the first line supervisor."

**Dep. Chief A. L. Gaskins**  
Newport News, VA  
(804) 247-8529

# Problem Solving in Practice #2

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## "KNOCK, KNOCK"

### Description of Problem

Officers Robert Milliron and Doug Griffith were dispatched to a disturbance at the Lighthouse Towers Condominium, a high rise security building. The complainant identified an unwanted guest in one of the units. The problem was a familiar one to the officers: they had no access to the building because the security guard had gone off duty. The officers were forced to park their police cruisers along nearby Gulf Boulevard and walk to the building, since the entrance gates had to be activated from inside the guard shack.

After passing through the entrance gates, the officers were confronted with yet another obstacle — entrance into the building itself. Having no entry key available to them, the officers scanned the resident directory and located the complainant's security code number. One officer dialed the number and let it ring 15 to 20 times, but received no response. At this point, the officers wondered if the situation justified forced entry into the building or if they should simply leave in the hopes that the problem would resolve itself. Fortunately, the complainant cancelled the call before the officers were forced to make a decision. Recognizing the serious problems such a situation could present, Milliron set out to find a solution.

On March 10, Milliron returned to Lighthouse Towers and spoke with the security officer on duty. Milliron obtained the name and number of the building manager and brought the access problem to his attention, focusing on the potential liability of the building owners if someone in the building were in serious trouble and the police could not gain entry.

The manager mentioned that the fire department had an access key to the gate and front entrance of the building. Milliron explained to him that the police do not routinely bring the fire department along on police-related calls unless there is an indication that their services are required. The manager suggested having another access key

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made and given to the police department. Milliron agreed that the key would be a start, but that it was only a partial and temporary solution. He told the manager that a better, long-term solution would continue to be sought.

The key itself posed several problems. First, it was impractical to issue a key to every officer who might be assigned to duty on the beach. Second, it would be difficult to locate a storage spot that would be both secure and accessible to all officers working the beach.

Officer Milliron investigated the possibility of appointing a contact person inside the building itself who would be responsible for opening the door for the police. This solution seemed plausible enough, but had built-in flaws. For one, it might be too much of a problem to have that person notify the police every time he or she went out of town or out for the evening. And who would coordinate these constantly changing conditions?

## Response

Milliron continued to search for a better and more efficient way of handling the problem. He again contacted the manager and arranged a meeting to discuss the dilemma. During the meeting Milliron asked him how the building's phone security system was set up. He learned that each room had its own access code programmed into the computer and linked to its telephone. Milliron asked if any telephone could be programmed into the system and the manager said it could. Milliron then asked if the manager would provide the police department with its own access code linked to the police communication center and the manager readily agreed.

## Results

The police department now has its own access code to Lighthouse Towers. Officers can gain entry to the building simply by dialing the access code, which signals the communication center to activate and open the door for an officer without having to bother anyone inside the building. Similar responses to related problems are currently being considered.

For more information contact Officers R. Milliron and D. Griffith, Clearwater Police Department, (813) 462-6041.

# SUBMISSIONS

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When submitting descriptions of problem solving efforts for the newsletter, remember to consider the following questions:

- What is the problem?
- For whom is it a problem and how are they harmed? How did the problem come to your attention?
- How has the department handled the problem in the past?
- What information did you collect about the problem?
- Where did you get the information?
- Did you have any difficulties in getting the information?
- Once you were clear what the problem was, what was your goal?
- What strategies did you develop to reach your goal?
- What agencies assisted the police department in achieving the desired goal?
- Did you accomplish your goal? How do you know that your goal was accomplished?
- What would you recommend to other police agencies interested in implementing similar strategies to address similar problems?
- Did you have fun? (Okay, you don't have to answer this one. I wouldn't want anyone to know that you actually had fun at work!!!)

# Problem Solving In Practice #3

## "PUTTING THE BRAKE ON QUIK STOP CRIME"

By John Stedman, Senior Researcher

### Description Of Problem

In the spring of 1985, the City of Gainesville began experiencing a severe increase in convenience store robberies. In an effort to deter these robberies, Chief of Police Wayland Clifton, Jr., agreed to work with convenience store industry representatives to develop crime prevention measures. The industry representatives asked for, and received, time to develop their own efforts to prevent the robberies.

After a year of study, the industry suggested that an increase in law enforcement personnel would decrease the incidence of such robberies. For their part, the stores failed to adopt such basic crime prevention measures as removing signs that block store windows, providing well-lit parking lots and keeping a minimum amount of cash in the stores. Meanwhile, store robberies continued to increase.

### Response

Chief Clifton then had members of his department research effective strategies currently employed by other jurisdictions facing similar problems. The officers found that several cities in the Akron, Ohio, area, as well as Coral Gables, Florida, had implemented stringent city ordinances which required convenience stores to adopt certain fundamental crime control measures. These cities experienced reductions in store robberies after the measures were implemented.

After conducting more research into these ordinances as well as an extensive analysis of the nature of robberies in Gainesville, the City Commission adopted the Gainesville Convenience Store Ordinance on July 24, 1986. The measure requires the removal of signs posted in windows, so that the view of the cash register and sales area is unobstructed; the locating of the sales area such

that the clerk and customer are fully visible from the street; the posting of a conspicuous sign indicating that a maximum of \$50.00 in cash is available to the employee; the lighting of parking lots to a certain intensity; the installation of a city approved security camera; the provision of mandatory robbery prevention training for employees who work between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m.; and the presence of two store employees on the premises until closing, if the store is open after 8 p.m.

The convenience store industry sought an injunction from a Federal court to stop the implementation of the ordinance. However, based on the material presented by the City of Gainesville, the judge denied the injunction and the ordinance went into effect immediately.

### Results

A preliminary evaluation of robbery activity in the brief time that the ordinance has been in place indicated a reduction of 65% in convenience store robberies. And nighttime robberies showed a 75% decrease—results which the city of Gainesville finds very encouraging.

A well-written and comprehensive report on this project is available from the Gainesville Police Department. For more information, contact Patrick T. Callahan, Coordinator of Criminal Justice Planning, P.O. Box 1250, 721 N.W. 6th St., Gainesville, FL 32602, (904) 374-2415.

### A PROBLEM SOLVING PROCESS

Scanning

Analysis

Response

Assessment

Actors

Incidents

Responses

## Problem Solving Report Available

The problem solving theory of policing, known as problem-oriented policing, was developed in 1979 by University of Wisconsin at Madison law professor, Herman Goldstein. Beginning in 1984, the National Institute of Justice and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) teamed up to test the effectiveness of the problem solving strategy when used by officers on routine patrol assignments. The objective was to demonstrate the utility of problem-oriented policing in improving the delivery of police services. The city of Newport News in coastal Virginia was the site of this innovative study.

The research efforts revealed that linking patterns of crime with community support can dramatically reduce the rate of crime. According to the study, a proactive, problem solving approach is often more effective than traditional, incident-driven policing.

The findings from that three-year study are now available in a paperback publication entitled, **Problem Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News**. The report, published by the Forum, is available for \$17 plus \$1.50 postage and handling. Send inquiries to PERF Publications, 2300 M Street, N.W., Suite 910, Washington, DC 20037.

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