

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

A REPORT WITH RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING
THE ROLE OF THE CRIME PREVENTION SPECIALIST

A LEARNING CONTRACT
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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MODULE I

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INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this paper is to show the benefit having a Crime Prevention Officer for the Terrell Police Department who would actively encourage the formation, support and evaluation of crime prevention efforts city wide. Community based policing assists neighborhoods in the development, coordination and maintenance of crime prevention strategies. The key to any successful crime prevention program is an active, involved and educated public. Crime prevention programs may take many forms, but to understand them properly, we must go back to the birth of the concept.

History of Crime Prevention Concept

Great Britain led the world in fostering modern-day crime prevention. The concept emerged early in the 19th. century and until that time all police action was taken after a crime had been committed. The principal deterrent was swift and severe punishment for persons found guilty of a crime. This punishment served as a reminder to potential violators that they should not stray far from the law. Although everyone was expected to comply with and assist the police in their fight against crime, the severity and frequent inconsistency of punishment offered little to ensure the citizen that his cooperation would not also lead him to the gallows. 1

Drawing upon the British experience the crime prevention concept was actively introduced to the United States in the late 1960's. Intrigued

by the British approach and their success in the field of crime prevention, John C. Klatter, Dean of the University of Louisville's School of Police Administration, began exploring how this concept could be applied within America's criminal justice system. One of the main issues in his research led to how the English prototype could be matched to the American context where it would require a major shift in emphasis from apprehension to prevention. As a result of Klatter's work, a pilot training program was begun at the University of Louisville in cooperation with the Kentucky Crime Commission and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. 2

From the police standpoint American law enforcement officers have always thought that crime prevention was accomplished by having uniformed officers in marked vehicles moving about the community and giving the impression of police omnipresence. This effort has been thought to be sufficient to deter crime, but, as can be seen from past crime statistical reports this method has not been very successful in either preventing or deterring crime.

Current Views

Throughout the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex surveys were conducted for this paper to determine the role and duties of their crime prevention specialist. As a result the larger departments such as Dallas, Garland, Mesquite, Plano and Grand Prairie require very similar duties and roles for their Crime Prevention Officers. The crime prevention specialists in those cities are responsible for compiling, analyzing, and

in those cities are responsible for compiling, analyzing, and disseminating crime statistics for the purpose of determining the areas that need to be singled out for what is called target hardening activities. These same statistical reports help determine where crime prevention programs are directed to make crime more difficult to commit. They also assist in the coordination of Operation I.D. within the community to discourage the activities of burglars and thieves. The Operation I.D. program would also be beneficial in helping the police locate the owner of found property and recovered stolen goods.

Organizing and maintaining neighborhood watch programs to act as the eyes and ears of police and to reduce the number of residential burglaries and the overall amount of criminal activity in neighborhoods is also a goal of crime prevention efforts. Crime prevention inspectors also conduct residential and commercial security surveys which is designed to recognize, appraise, and anticipate loss potential. The specialist informs the businessman or homeowner of the specific areas of vulnerability and the steps that can be taken to reduce or minimize the loss.

Another important facet of crime prevention specialist activity is the ensuring of media coverage of department crime prevention programs, since crime prevention cannot work without a well informed and motivated public. It is very important that the crime prevention specialist reach the public with information about programs and techniques that citizens can use to reduce opportunities for the commission of crime. The media is also very influential in getting information to many people in a short time.

The education of businesses in robbery suppression information and techniques consists of the crime prevention specialist making recommendations to the employee about the way he/she should act or which action to be taken in the event of a robbery (showing them how and when to use an alarm, mark doorways at varying heights to facilitate subsequent identification of the robber, cash registers rigged with "bait money", and bills which have had the serial numbers pre-recorded to give to the robber.) The crime prevention specialist must also assist businesses in adopting forged check defense strategies on what to look for and how to detect a forged or altered check.

It is also the crime prevention specialist's responsibility to train other officers in the basic crime prevention techniques such as recommending that citizens upgrade their locks if burglars have gained entry the same way each time, or install security lights if burglars are entering in the dark secluded side of a residence or business. The crime prevention specialist must also perform an aspect of community relations programs where an analysis of the community determines the needs of the community so it can better be served, this involves interactions with groups and organizations critical to the effective operations of the department. The insight gained from the exchanges of information in the community allows the department to review its practices. This type of information based review would allow the department to make improvements and correct actions that could reduce community tensions and grievances.

Smaller agencies in the Dallas area (e.g., Burleson, Hurst and Greenville Police Departments) are just coming of age as far as crime prevention is concerned. Although it is their objective to educate the citizens of their communities about crime, they cannot or have not dedicated the necessary manpower to a division that is probably the second-most important division in any police department. Without real institutional dedication, crime prevention programs cannot be effective. Only their Crime-Stoppers program is a preventive program proven to be effective in dealing with some of the unsolved crimes. Nevertheless, many reported to Crime-Stoppers for solution could be prevented entirely if a crime prevention specialist were giving full-time to those preventive duties designed to make citizens, homes and businesses more difficult to burglarize. They could also train citizens to avoid threatening situations and react correctly when attacked or threatened.

Budget constraints make it difficult to pull an officer from patrol for assignment to crime prevention, but the question must be asked as to whether they can afford not to reassign their personnel. Departments operating under severe budget constraints tend to train more of their officers in crime prevention so the patrol division is not depleted and officers on the street can work crime prevention while on patrol or they may organize special crime prevention units dedicated only to crime prevention. These are usually smaller agencies and, then, it becomes clear that they remain uncertain about the proper role of the crime prevention specialist.

The Hurst Police Department appears to be a front-runner among the smaller departments surveyed concerning the role of the crime prevention specialist in their department. The Hurst Police Department's Crime Prevention Specialist plays the role of community relations officer, but he is also responsible for implementing all crime prevention programs. As a community relations officer, the crime prevention specialist interacts with the patrol and criminal investigations personnel so that crime prevention information can be exchanged and disseminated throughout the department. He is also responsible for public presentations to civic, community groups or any interested groups covering crime prevention topics such as assault prevention, fraud prevention, "Operation I.D.," child safety, drug awareness and neighborhood watch programs.

Summary

Since it should be the overall mission of the Terrell Police Department and the Crime Prevention Specialist to reduce or stabilize the crime rate in the city by reducing the opportunity for crime, it is recommended that the Terrell Police Department adopt portions of the plans devised by larger Metroplex police departments and the Hurst Police Department, adapting these programs to the needs of the Terrell Police Department by a variety of creative strategies. A successful crime prevention specialist not only would generate crime prevention actions and public awareness throughout the community, but the Crime Prevention Specialist would also improve personal neighborhood and community safety and security as part of an overall reassertion of positive community control.

End Notes

- 1 The Home of Crime Prevention Training Centre, Stafford, England, p. 1
- 2 Koepsell-Gerard and Associates, 1974, pp 4-10, A Report Prepared for Prepared for the National Crime Prevention Institute, (Falls Church, Virginia)

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