U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

NIJ Reports

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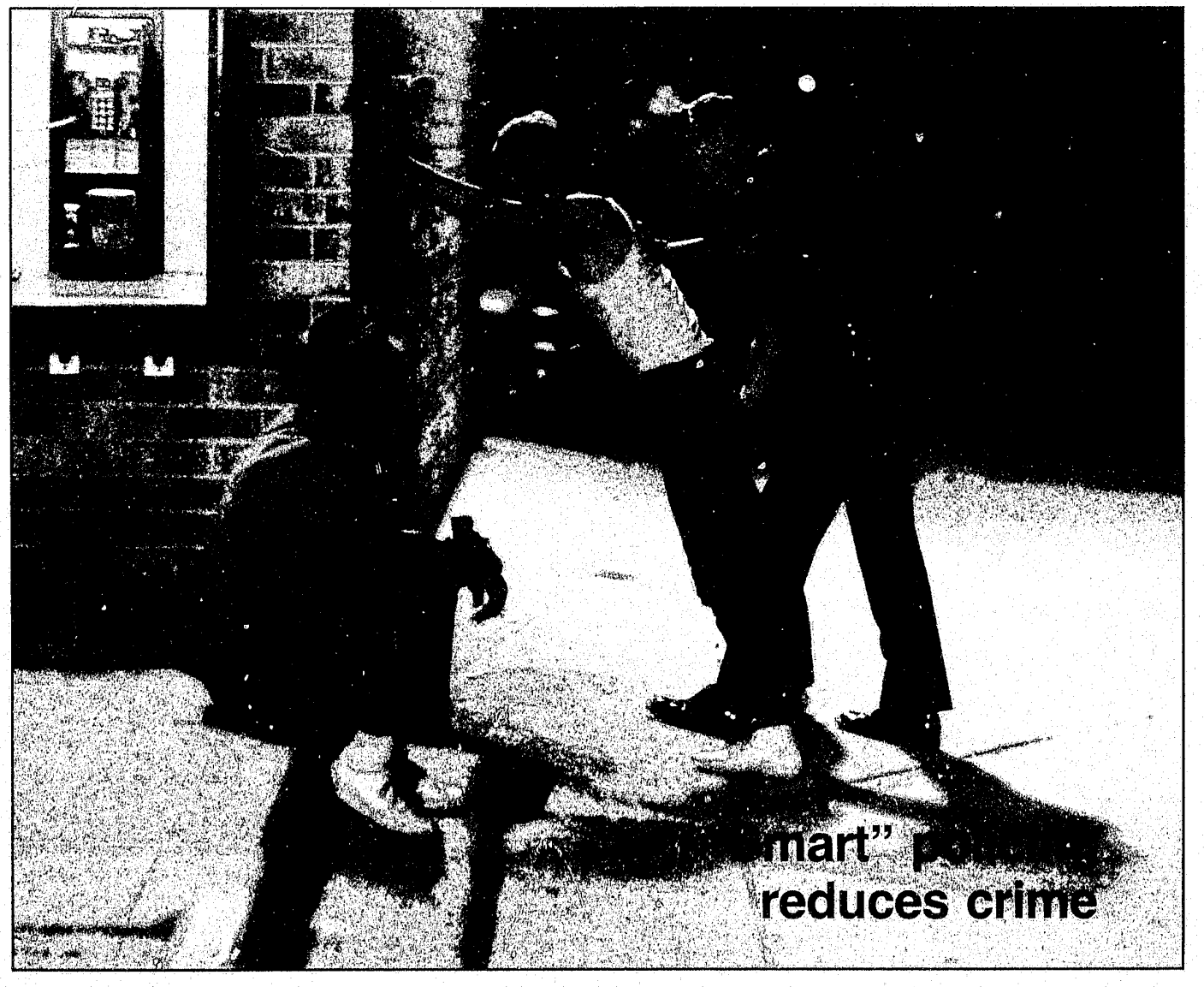


"mart" [illegible] reduces crime

Director's notes

Many calls to police are repeated requests for help. They have a history and a future—sometimes tragic. Rather than treat the call as a 30-minute event and go on to the next incident, police need to intervene in the cycle and try to eliminate the source of the problem. Police have unique access to information and data that can empower them to intervene in recurring criminal incidents. Research sponsored by the National Institute of Justice has led to an approach that makes this part of standard police procedures.

The problem-solving approach to policing described in this issue of *NIJ Reports* represents a significant evolutionary step in helping law enforcement work smarter not harder. The strategy is outlined in an article by William Spelman and John Eck of the Police Executive Research Forum, which directed NIJ's study of problem-oriented policing in cooperation with the Newport News, Virginia, Police Department.

Rather than approaching calls for help or service as separate, individual events to be processed by traditional methods, problem-oriented policing emphasizes analyzing groups of incidents and deriving solutions that draw upon a wide variety of public and private resources. Careful followup and assessment of police performance in dealing with the problem completes the systematic process.

But problem-oriented policing is as much a philosophy of policing as a set of techniques and procedures. The approach can be applied to whatever type of "problem" is consuming police time and resources. While many problems are likely to be crime-oriented, disorderly behavior, situations that contribute to neighborhood deterioration, and other incidents that contribute to fear and insecurity in urban neighborhoods are also targets for the problem-solving approach.

In devising research to test the idea, the National Institute wanted to move crime analysis beyond pin maps. We were fortunate to have the cooperation of Darrel Stephens, then Chief of Police in Newport News, Virginia, an outstanding administrator whose background includes both research and strong law enforcement experience. The National Institute is indebted to the Newport News Police Department for serving as a laboratory for testing problem-oriented policing. The results achieved in solving problems and reducing target crimes are encouraging.

Problem-oriented policing integrates knowledge from past research on police operations that has converged on two main themes: increased operational effectiveness and closer involvement with the community.

The evolution of ideas will go on. Under the Institute's aegis, the Police Executive Research Forum will implement problem-oriented policing in three other cities: St. Petersburg, Tampa, and Clearwater, Florida. The test will enable us to learn whether the results are the same under different management styles and in dealing with different local problems. This is how national research benefits local communities—by providing tested new options they can consider.

A number of questions remain about problem-oriented policing. Careful evaluation of the experiences of other police agencies can shed light on issues such as:

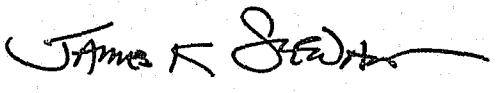
- The proper limits of the police under a process like problem-oriented policing. Should police be restricted to crime and order maintenance problems or should they deal with any problem that comes to their attention that is a matter of concern to municipal government?

- Will problem-oriented policing be workable in all types of police departments? In major urban centers?

- How will other city agencies react when police begin to handle problems that traditionally have been the domain of other government entities?

- Who should decide what alternative responses will be used—the police officer, the supervisor, the chief, the mayor or city manager, or citizens themselves?

These and other concerns must be grappled with as we assess the potential of problem-oriented policing. For now, the approach offers promise. It doesn't cost a fortune but can be developed within the resources of most police departments. Problem-oriented policing suggests that police can realize a new dimension of effectiveness. By coordinating a wide range of information and using it to design strategies, police administrators are in a unique leadership position in their communities, helping to improve the quality of life for the citizens they serve.



James K. Stewart
Director
National Institute of Justice

Newport News tests problem-oriented policing

by William Spelman and John E. Eck

At 1:32 a.m. a man we will call Fred Snyder dials 911 from a downtown corner phone booth. The dispatcher notes his location and calls the nearest patrol unit. Officer Knox arrives 4 minutes later.

Snyder says he was beaten and robbed 20 minutes before but didn't see the robber. Under persistent questioning Snyder admits he was with a prostitute, picked up in a bar. Later, in a hotel room, he discovered the prostitute was actually a man, who then beat Snyder and took his wallet.

Snyder wants to let the whole matter drop. He refuses medical treatment for his injuries. Knox finishes his report and lets Snyder go home. Later that day Knox's report reaches Detective Alexander's desk. She knows from experience the case will go nowhere, but she calls Snyder at work.

Snyder confirms the report but refuses to cooperate further. Knox and Alexander go on to other cases. Months later, reviewing crime statistics, the city council deplores the difficulty of attracting businesses or people downtown.

Reacting to incidents reported by citizens—as this hypothetical example illustrates—is the standard method for delivering police services today. But there is growing recognition that standard "incident-driven" policing methods do not have a substantial impact on many of the problems that citizens want police to help solve. Equally important, enforcing the law is but one of many ways that police can cope with citizens' problems.

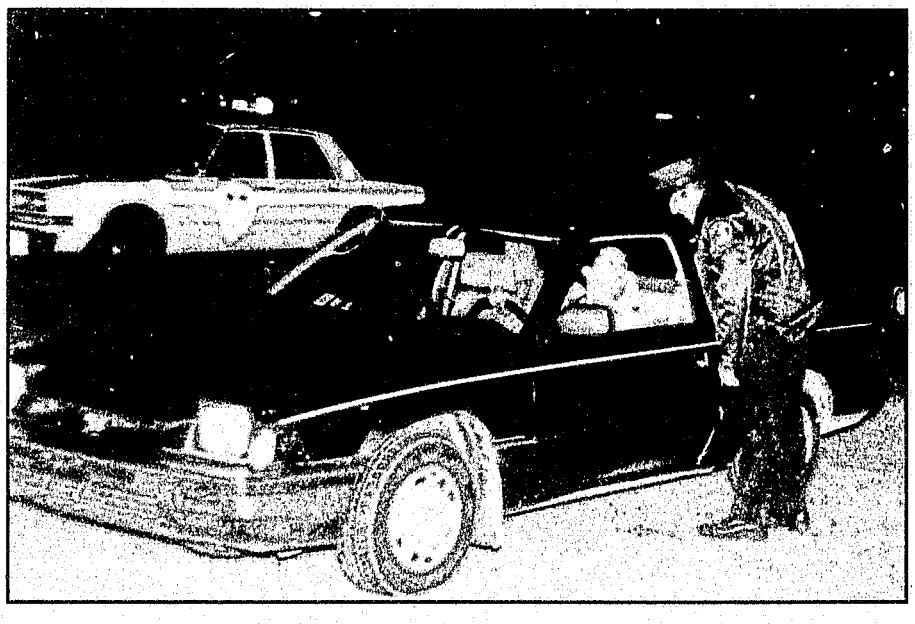
This article describes an alternative approach to policing. Called problem-oriented policing, it grew out of an awareness of the limitations of standard practices.

Police officers, detectives, and their supervisors can use the problem-oriented approach to identify, analyze, and respond, on a routine basis, to the underlying circumstances that create the incidents.

Although alternative methods of handling problems have long been available, police have made relatively little use of them. Or they have been used only sporadically, most often by a special unit or an informal group of innovative officers.

Problem-oriented policing is the outgrowth of 20 years of research into police operations that converged on three main themes: *increased effectiveness* by attacking underlying problems that give rise to incidents that consume patrol and detective time; *reliance on the expertise and creativity of line officers* to study problems carefully and develop innovative solutions; and *closer involvement with the public* to make sure that the police are addressing the needs of citizens. The strategy consists of four parts.

1. *Scanning*. Instead of relying upon broad, law-related concepts—robbery, burglary, for example—officers are encouraged to group individual related incidents that come to their attention as "problems" and define these problems in more precise and therefore useful terms. For example, an incident that typically would be classified simply as a "robbery" might be seen as part of a pattern of prostitution-related robberies committed by transvestites in center-city hotels.



Police use a checklist approach to uncover the underlying circumstances of a problem. This investigation method resulted in an average 53-percent reduction in thefts from motor vehicles outside the Newport News shipyards.

William Spelman and John Eck are both Senior Research Associates with the Police Executive Research Forum in Washington, D.C.

The problem-oriented approach

Midnight-watch patrol officers are tired of taking calls like Snyder's. They and their sergeant, James Hogan, decide to reduce prostitution-related robberies, and Officer James Boswell volunteers to lead the effort.

First, Boswell interviews the 28 prostitutes who work the downtown area to learn how they solicit, what happens when they get caught, and why they are not deterred.

They work downtown bars, they tell him, because customers are easy to find and police patrols don't spot them soliciting. Arrests, the prostitutes tell Boswell, are just an inconvenience: Judges routinely sentence them to probation, and probation conditions are not enforced.

Based on what he has learned from the interviews and his previous experience, Boswell devises a response. He works with the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board and local barowners to move the prostitutes into the street. At police request, the Commonwealth's Attorney agrees to ask the judges to put stiffer conditions on probation: Convicted prostitutes would be given a map of the city and told to stay out of the downtown area or go to jail for 3 months.

Boswell then works with the vice unit to make sure that downtown prostitutes are arrested and convicted, and that patrol officers know which prostitutes are on probation. Probation violators *are* sent to jail, and within weeks all but a few of the prostitutes have left downtown.

Then Boswell talks to the prostitutes' customers, most of whom don't know that almost half the prostitutes working the street are actually men, posing as women. He intervenes in street transactions, formally introducing the customers to their male dates. The Navy sets up talks for him with incoming sailors to tell them about the male prostitutes and the associated safety and health risks.

In 3 months, the number of prostitutes working downtown drops from 28 to 6 and robbery rates are cut in half. After 18 months neither robbery nor prostitution show signs of returning to their earlier levels.

2. *Analysis*. Officers working on a well-defined "problem" then collect information from a variety of public and private sources—not just police data. They use the information to illuminate the underlying nature of the problem, suggesting its causes and a variety of options for its resolution.

3. *Response*. Working with citizens, businesses, and public and private agencies, officers tailor a program of action suitable to the characteristics of the problem. Solutions may go beyond traditional criminal justice system remedies to include other community agencies or organizations.

4. *Assessment*. Finally, the officers evaluate the impact of these efforts to see if the problems were actually solved or alleviated.

To test the value of this approach, the National Institute of Justice sponsored the Problem-Oriented Policing Project, conducted by the Newport News (Virginia) Police Department and the Police Executive Research Forum. Results of the project are encouraging:

- Downtown robberies were reduced by 39 percent (see the boxed account).
- Burglaries in an apartment complex were reduced 35 percent.
- Thefts from parked vehicles outside a manufacturing plant dropped 53 percent.

This article describes the research that led to problem-oriented policing, the approach used in Newport News, and some of the problems officers there solved. It shows that police can link a detailed understanding of specific local problems and a commitment to using a wide array of community resources in solving them. By so doing, they increase the effectiveness of their operations.

The present system

Under incident-driven policing, police departments typically deliver service by

- reacting to individual events reported by citizens;
- gathering information from victims, witnesses, and offenders;
- invoking the criminal justice process;
- using aggregate crime statistics to evaluate performance.

No department operates solely in this reactive fashion, but all do it to some extent almost all the time. The way that Newport News tackled prostitution-related robbery (see box) illustrates how problem-oriented policing minimizes the limitations of the traditional concepts and conduct of police work.

The focus on underlying causes—*problems*—is not new. Many police officers do it from time to time. The new approach, however, requires *all* officers to implement problem-solving techniques on a routine basis.

Problem-oriented policing pushes beyond the limits of the usual police methods. The keystone of the approach is the "crime-analysis model."

This checklist includes many of the usual factors familiar to police investigators—actors, locations, motives. But it goes further, prompting officers to ask far more questions than usual and in a more logical sequence. The results give a more comprehensive picture of a problem.

The process also requires officers to collect information from a wide variety of sources beyond the police department and enlist support from public and private organizations and groups—initially to describe the problem and later to fashion solutions that meet public needs as well as those of the criminal justice system.

The research basis

Problem-oriented policing has as its foundation five areas of research conducted during the past two decades.

Newport News tests problem-oriented policing

Discretion. In the 1960's, researchers pointed out the great discretion police officers exercise and concerns about the effects of discretion on the equity and efficiency of police service delivery. Although some discretion appeared necessary, research suggested that police could prevent abuses by structuring discretion. Through guidelines and policies, police agencies guided their officers on the best means of handling sensitive incidents.

But where should the policies come from? In 1979 Herman Goldstein described what he called the "problem-oriented approach" as a means of developing such guidelines for a more effective and efficient method of policing.

Problem studies. A number of studies over the past 20 years aimed at developing a deeper understanding of the nature and causes of crime and disorder problems in order to lead to better police responses.

Research of the late 1960's and early 1970's focused on burglary, robbery, and other street crimes. In the later 1970's and 1980's, research turned to other problems not earlier considered central to police work: domestic violence, drunk driving, mental illness, and the fear of crime, for example.

Researchers and practitioners learned through these studies that they would have to collect more information to understand problems, and involve other organizations if responses were to be effective. Police needed to consider seriously many issues besides crime alone.

Management. Meanwhile the characteristics of American police officers were changing. More were getting college degrees and thinking of themselves as professionals. Like industrial workers, officers began to demand a greater role in decisionmaking.

Many police managers, recognizing that job satisfaction and participation in decisions influence job performance, made better use of officers' skills and talents. Managers made the work more interesting through job enrichment, and they made working conditions more flexible. Many departments established task forces, quality circles, or management-by-objectives programs.

Community relations. The riots of the 1960's made police aware of their strained relations with minority communities. Community relations units, stringent restrictions on shooting, and civilian review boards attempted to reduce dissatisfaction with police among minorities.

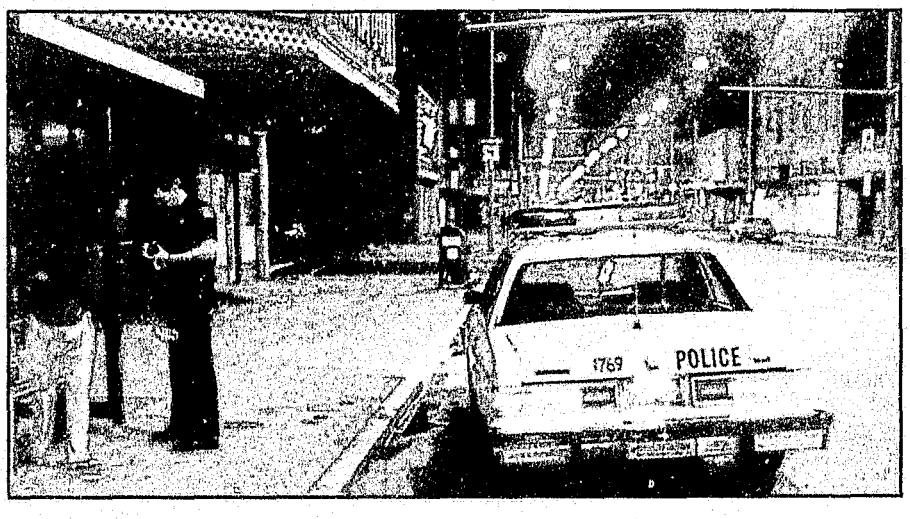
By the mid-1970's, departments provided storefront police stations and foot patrols to improve public attitudes through increased personal contact between police and citizens. As police began to recognize how vital citizen action is to crime control, some agencies began to work closely with citizens to reduce crime and fear.

Effectiveness. An important impetus toward problem-oriented policing came finally when research on preventive patrol, response time, and investigations showed that merely reacting to incidents had, at best, limited effects on crime and public satisfaction. Rapid response and lengthy followup investigations were not needed for many incidents, suggesting that police managers could deploy their officers more flexibly without reducing effectiveness.

Experiments in flexible deployment such as split force, investigative case screening, and differential response to calls confirmed that time could be freed for other activities. Managers turned to crime analysis to use this time, focusing on groups of events rather than isolated incidents. By identifying crime-prone locations, crime analysis hoped to use patrol and detective time more effectively. Although crime analysis was restricted to crime problems, traditional police data sources, and criminal justice responses, it marked the first attempt at problem-oriented policing.

Designing problem-oriented policing

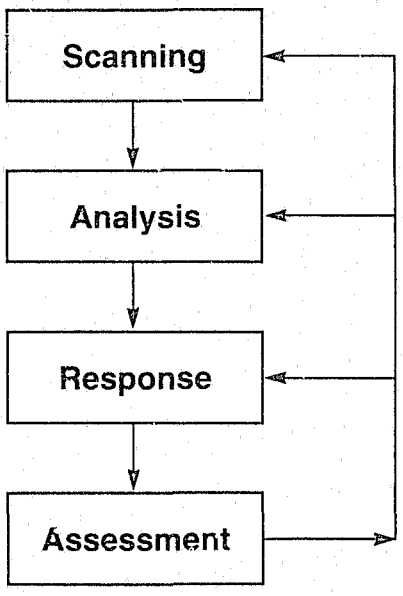
Some departments had previously applied problem-solving approaches in special units or projects.[1] None before Newport News had taken a problem-solving approach agencywide. The National Institute of Justice and Police Chief Darrel Stephens required that the experimental approach follow four basic principles:



To reduce prostitution in the downtown area, police interviewed prostitutes and their customers. What they learned helped them devise a plan that significantly reduced prostitution—and related robberies—in the area.

[1] Among the most notable examples: John P. Bales and Timothy N. Oettmeier, "Houston's DART Program—A Transition to the Future," *FBI Enforcement Bulletin* 54 (December 1985): 13–17; William DeJong, "Project DARE: Teaching Kids To Say 'No' to Drugs and Alcohol," *NIJ Reports* 196 (March 1986): 2–5 (Los Angeles Police Department); Philip B. Taft, Jr., *Fighting Fear: The Baltimore County C.O.P.E. Program* (Washington, D.C.: Police Executive Research Forum, 1986). The New York City Police Department's Community Patrol Officer Program (CPOP) is by far the largest problem-oriented unit implemented to date. More information on CPOP is available from the New York City Police or the Vera Institute of Justice.

The problem-solving process



- **Participation.** Officers of all ranks, from all units, should be able to use the procedures as part of their daily routine.
- **Information.** The system must encourage use of a broad range of information not limited to conventional police data.
- **Response.** The system should encourage a broad range of solutions not limited to the criminal justice process.
- **Reproducibility.** The system must be one that any large police agency could apply.

The Newport News Police Department named 12 members, from all ranks and units, to a task force to design the process. Having no experience with routine problem solving, the task force decided to test the process it was designing on two persistent problems: burglaries from an apartment complex and thefts from vehicles. All subsequent problems, including the prostitution-related robbery problem described on page 2, were handled by patrol officers, detectives, and supervisors on their normal assignments.

As stated above, the process has four stages. Officers identify problems during the *scanning* stage, collect and analyze information during the *analysis* stage, work with other agencies and the public to develop and implement solutions in the *response* stage, and evaluate their effectiveness in the *assessment* stage. The results of assessment may be used to revise the response, collect more data, or even redefine the problem.

The heart of the process is the analysis stage. The task force designed a problem analysis model, breaking the events that constitute a problem into three components—actors, incidents, and responses—with a checklist of issues that officers should consider when they study a problem.

All sergeants and higher ranks were trained in the model, the use of the systematic process, and the research background. The training also emphasized encouraging officer initiative in uncovering problems, collecting information, and developing responses. Officers throughout the department then began to apply the process.

Problem-oriented policing at work

By June 1986, some two dozen problems had been identified and were in various stages of analysis, response, and assessment. Some problems affected citizens throughout the city; others were confined to neighborhoods. Some problems related to crime, others to the order maintenance, regulatory, or service roles of the police.

In addition to the prostitution-related robberies, Newport News selected apartment burglaries and thefts from parked vehicles as test problems.

Burglaries in the New Briarfield Apartments. Built as temporary housing for shipyard workers in 1942, the 450 wood-frame units called the New Briarfield Apartments remained in use during the postwar housing shortage—and into the present.

By 1984, New Briarfield was known as the worst housing in the city. It also had the highest crime rate: burglars hit 23 percent of the occupied units each year. The task force assigned Detective Tony Duke of the Crime Analysis Unit to study the problem.

Duke had patrol and auxiliary officers survey a random one-third sample of the households in January 1985. The residents confirmed that burglary was a serious problem, but they were equally upset by the physical deterioration of the complex. Duke then interviewed employees of other city departments and

Some problems being considered by Newport News Police

Citywide

Assaults on police officers
Thefts of gasoline from self-service filling stations
Domestic violence
Drunk driving
Repeat runaway youths

In neighborhoods

Commercial burglaries, Jefferson Avenue business district
Heroin dealing, 32d and Chestnut
Residential burglaries, New Briarfield Apartments
Residential burglaries, Glenn Gardens Apartments
Thefts from automobiles, downtown parking area
Dirt bikes, Newmarket Creek
Rowdy youths, Peninsula Skating Rink
Rowdy youths, Marshall Avenue 7-Eleven
Robbery and prostitution, Washington Avenue
Vacant buildings, central business area
Larcenies, Beachmont Gardens Apartments
Unlicensed drinking places, Aqua Vista Apartments
Disorders and larcenies, Village Square Shopping Center

Newport News tests problem-oriented policing

The problem analysis model

Actors
- Victims
  - Lifestyle
  - Security measures taken
  - Victimization history
- Offenders
  - Identity and physical description
  - Lifestyle, education, employment history
  - Criminal history
- Third parties
  - Personal data
  - Connection to victimization

Incidents
- Sequence of events
  - Events preceding act
  - Event itself
  - Events following criminal act
- Physical contact
  - Time
  - Location
  - Access control and surveillance
- Social context
  - Likelihood and probable actions of witnesses
  - Apparent attitude of residents toward neighborhood

Responses
- Community
  - Neighborhood affected by problem
  - City as a whole
  - People outside the city
- Institutional
  - Criminal justice agencies
  - Other public agencies
  - Mass media
  - Business sector

found that the burglaries were related in part to the general deterioration of the housing.

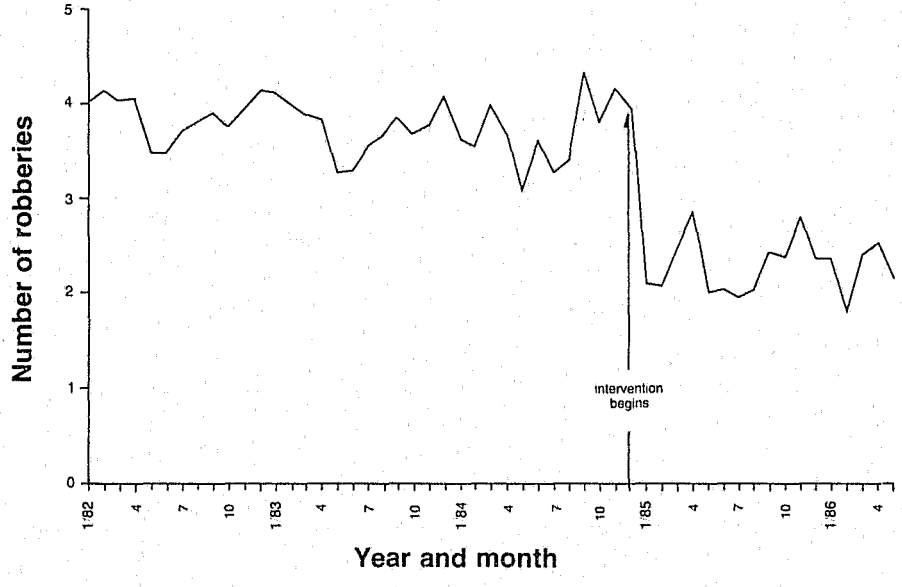
The Fire Department called New Briarfield a firetrap. Public Works worried about flooding; the complex had no storm sewers. Standing water rotted the floors, noted the Department of Codes Compliance. Cracks around doors and windows made it easier for burglars to force their way in. Vacant units, unfit to rent, sheltered burglars and drug addicts.

Officer Barry Haddix, responsible for patrolling the area, decided to clean up the grounds. Working with the apartment manager and city agencies, he arranged to have trash and abandoned appliances removed, abandoned cars towed, potholes filled, and streets swept.

Detective Duke meanwhile learned that the complex owners were in default on a loan and that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) was about to foreclose. Duke wrote a report describing the crime problem, the tenants' discouragement, and the views of other city agencies.

Police Chief Stephens used the report to enlist other departments in a joint recommendation to the city manager: Help the tenants find better housing and demolish New Briarfield. The city manager approved. In June 1986, he proposed replacing Briarfield with a new 220-unit complex, a middle school, and a small shopping center. Negotiations are underway with HUD.

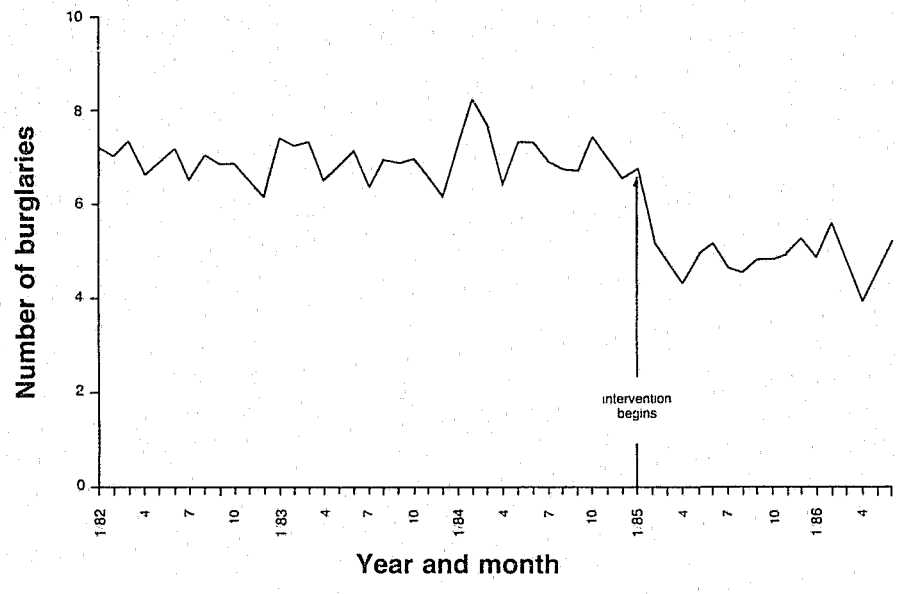
Personal robberies: An average reduction of 39 percent in downtown area



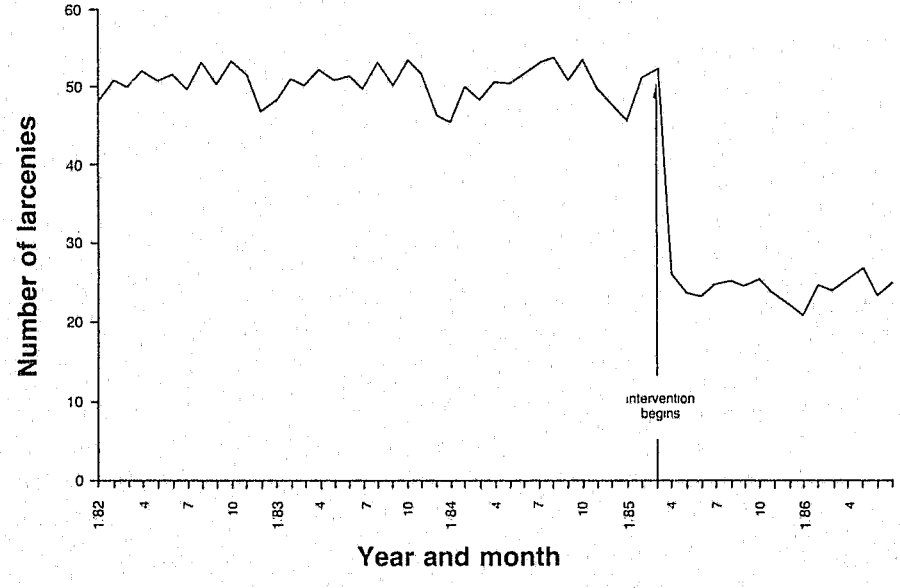
The long-range solution will take time to implement. For now, the police force assigned Officer Vernon Lyons full-time to organize the neighborhood residents. Since January 1986 the New Briarfield Community Association has been persuading residents to take better care of the neighborhood and lobbying the resident manager and city agencies to keep the complex properly maintained. Visibly better living conditions have resulted—and the burglary rate has dropped by 35 percent.

Thefts from vehicles in shipyard parking lots. Newport News Shipbuilding employs 36,000 people. Most drive to work and park in nearby lots. In 1984, thefts from these cars amounted to $180,000 in losses, not counting vehicle damage—a total that accounted for 10 percent of all serious, reported crime.

Household burglaries: An average reduction of 35 percent in New Briarfield



Larcenies from autos: An average reduction of 53 percent in downtown area



Police were frustrated. They answered many calls but made few arrests. The task force chose Officer Paul Swartz to analyze the issues.

He tracked current cases and reviewed offense and arrest records for the previous 3 years. He interviewed patrol officers and detectives who knew the area and talked with shipyard security officers. This led to identification of theft-prone lots—and of a small group of frequent offenders who might be committing most of the thefts.

As a result, one person was arrested in the act of breaking into a car, and Swartz interviewed the offender after he was convicted, promising that nothing he said would bring extra punishment. Swartz learned that drugs were a prime target of the thieves, who looked for "muscle" cars, rock-and-roll bumper stickers, or other hints that the car owner used marijuana or cocaine.

The information led to more arrests and convictions, further interviews, and still further arrests.

The police department is still developing a long-term solution, working with parking lot owners and shipyard workers to develop a prevention program. In the interim, however, the arrest, conviction, and incarceration of the most frequent offenders has reduced thefts by 53 percent since April 1985.

New information, new responses

One reason for these successes has been the police use of information from a wider variety of sources. A survey of residents is an example, like interviews with thieves and prostitutes, but so are literature reviews, interviews with runaways and their parents, business surveys, photographing of problem sites, and searches of tax and title records.

The responses to prostitution-related robberies and parking-lot thefts are standard tactics, but in these cases the involvement of people outside the criminal justice system was important. The resources used are as diverse as the problems themselves.

Problem-oriented policing helps ensure that police respond to a wide variety of problems affecting the quality of life, not just crime. It lets line officers use their experience and knowledge to improve the communities they serve.

The Newport News Police Department—and other departments that adopt and refine this approach—will continue to respond to specific criminal events. But they will go beyond this step, preventing future incidents by solving the problems that would otherwise lead to crime and disorder.

The problem-oriented police department thus will be able to take the initiative in working with other agencies on community problems when those problems touch on police responsibilities. Such a department can make more efficient use of its resources when, for example, it reduces the number of prostitutes and thus needs fewer officers to patrol downtown.

This police force will be more responsive to citizen needs, enjoying better community relations when citizens see the police demonstrating concern for their day-to-day needs.

The result will be a more effective response to crime and other troubling conditions in our cities.

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For more information

The National Institute of Justice will soon publish a more complete report on the Newport News project. In the meantime, those seeking additional information may contact the Project Director: John Eck, Senior Research Associate, Police Executive Research Forum (PERF), 2301 M Street NW., Washington, DC 20006.

This Research in Action article has also been published as part of the National Institute of Justice's *Research in Brief* series under the title "Problem-Oriented Policing" (NCJ 102371). The *Research in Brief* contains the same text but is amplified with footnotes and an introduction from James K. Stewart, Director of the National Institute of Justice. "Problem-Oriented Policing" was announced in the November 1986 issue of *NIJ Reports* and may be obtained free by calling NCJRS at 800–851–3420 or writing the National Institute of Justice/NCJRS, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850.

The National Institute of Justice/NCJRS has available several other publications and information products that are relevant to the issues discussed in the article.

These may be obtained from the order form on the center pages:

Policing a City's Central District—The Oakland Story, $5.80. NCJ 096708. Check no. 43.

Targeting Law Enforcement Resources—The Career Criminal Focus. $5.80. NCJ 100129. Check no. 44.

Danger to Police in Domestic Disturbances—A New Look (*Research in Brief*), free. NCJ 102634. Check no. 47.

Field Training for Police Officers: State of the Art (*Research in Brief*), free. NCJ 102633. Check no. 57.

Single copies of the publications listed below may be obtained free while supplies last by writing National Institute of Justice/NCJRS, Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20850.

Directed Patrol Manual—Juvenile Problems, NCJ 097348.

Police Handling of Youth Gangs, NCJ 088927.