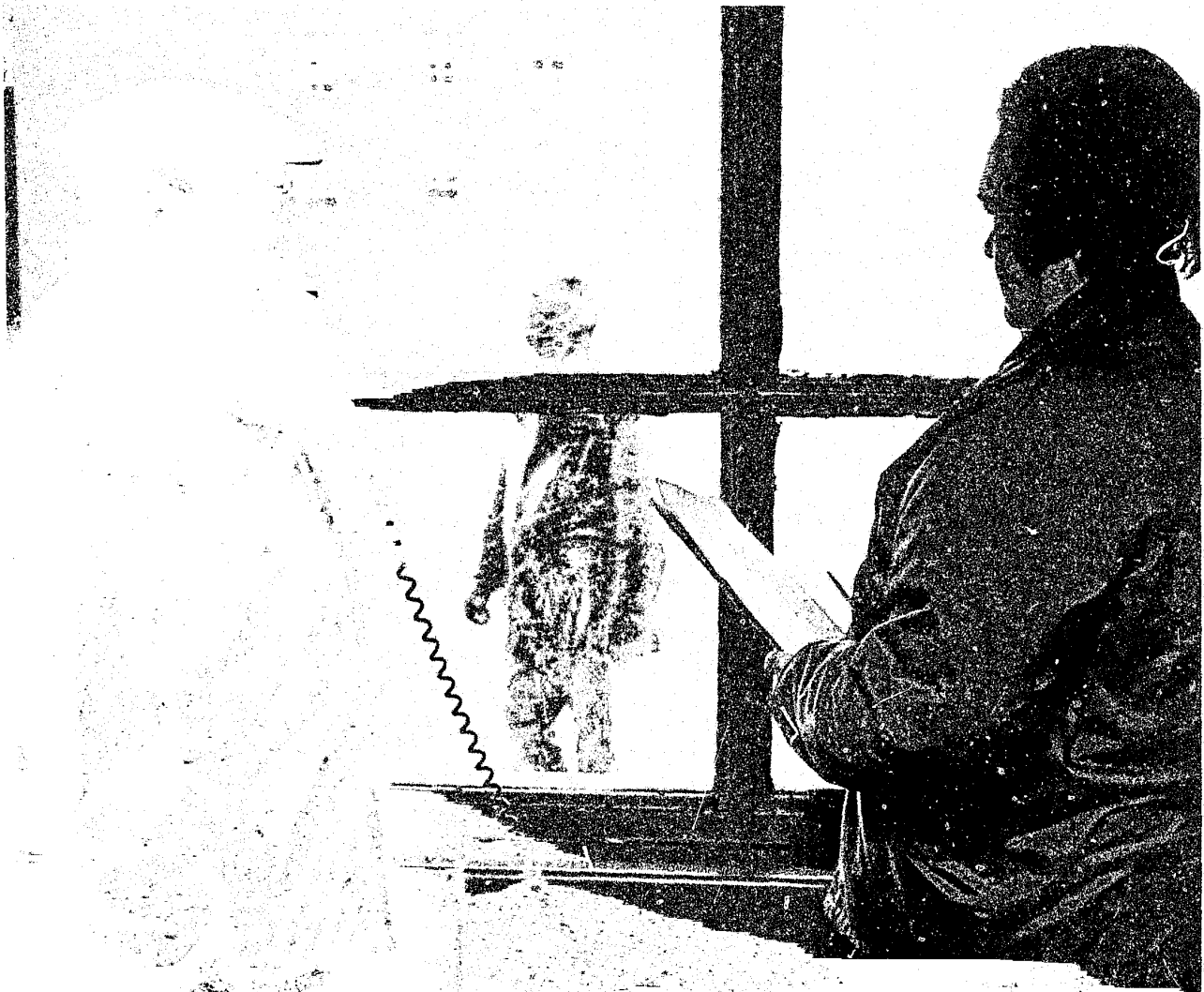


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# New York's Experiment in Tenant Safety

By Samuel Granville

Tenant patrol operations cover wide range of activities.





The incidence of major crime within New York City's public housing projects is only about a third of that for the city as a whole. Nevertheless, it is a cause of intense concern to the Housing Authority and our residents. We have studied many proposals for improving security in our developments and have adopted those which give the best promise of increased security at manageable cost. Some are in the experimental operating phase, while still others are in the planning and design stage.

Citizens of New York, like their counterparts the world over, depend upon their municipal police force for their basic security. Public housing tenants also rely upon the municipal police force for their basic security, but the New York City Housing Authority also provides a supplemental police force of some 1900 men. This force operates exclusively to provide additional police protection for the more than 600,000 residents in public housing.

These limitations in New York's as well as other tenant patrol programs are outweighed, by far, by the advantages—one of which is noted by Luther Williams of 120 Kingsboro 1st Walk in Brooklyn. "Because of the tenant patrol, Kingsboro has now become one large family with everyone showing love and respect for each other."

#### Tenant Patrols

From a search for economically feasible ways of meeting the pressing demand for greater security there emerged the tenant patrol idea. We explored the possibility that our ten-

ants might be willing—in view of the depth of their concern—to make some contribution to their own security. If tenants could contribute in a way which would substantially increase the effectiveness of our current



police forces, and at the same time gain a greater understanding of the problem of providing adequate security, everyone might benefit.

At this point, some five years after the tenant patrol program began, we feel it has succeeded far beyond our expectations. There are now more than 12,000 tenant volunteers involved in approximately 120 patrols operating in every borough in the city. In many cases, the impact of these patrols on criminal activity and interior vandalism has been dramatic. In every case, the presence of the patrols has furnished some measure of reassurance to the residents.

As important as these direct gains have been, we have been equally gratified by an important by-product of the patrols—a greatly enhanced participation and responsibility among large numbers of tenants.

In terms of effectiveness, interest and involvement of tenants, the tenant patrol program represents the most successful of the many approaches to the security problem beyond uniformed patrolmen and improved hardware.

Tenant reaction offers the best gauge of the success of tenant patrol in the city's projects:

"Our patrol has made our building a safer and cleaner place to live," says Mrs. Elease Witherspoon, commenting on changes in her Amsterdam Avenue complex since tenant patrol was instituted there.

"Tenant patrol is doing a marvelous job in 1010 East 178th Street and New York City as a whole," says Mrs. Violet DeGenspe.

Mrs. Maude Askins is satisfied with how tenant patrol has changed the Queensbridge community by "bringing the tenants closer together."

"Tenant patrol means security, but it also means people of all races and nationalities relating to each other," said Rudy Frank of 2861 Exterior Street in The Bronx. "And, after all," he added, "what's more important than people communicating with one another."

#### Plan Built on Voluntarism

With the exception of a few projects in which it was possible to hire young men with Youth Corps funds, the plan relies on tenant volunteers. The program has, in fact, been uniquely successful in enlisting low-income tenants in a program of self-help and, in the process, creating better management-tenant cooperation.

Although the tenant patrol program operates largely on a decentralized basis, with the housing manager giving guidance to an essentially autonomous patrol, assisted by a locally hired part-time patrol supervisor, we have found a central unit most helpful; there is just no substitute for the drive, enthusiasm and expertise that a small staff of dedicated employees, assigned full time to this novel program, brings to bear on the numerous details and problems involved. The tenant patrol unit currently includes an assistant housing manager, a housing assistant and three part-time consultants, who aid in the formation and maintenance of patrols in the various developments. The duties of the assistant manager and housing assistant reflect the central supervision we provide. They:

- supervise three part-time consultants;

- maintain liaison with project managers who call frequently for advice concerning initiation or operating problems of tenant patrols, purchase of equipment, etc.;

- review weekly reports from patrol supervisors and follow up on special problems with the managers. Inevitably, they get many requests for information directly from tenant patrol supervisors, although it is our policy to refer them to the manager, if at all possible;

- review requisitions for equipment;

- attend meetings at projects about once a week;

- prepare a monthly report; prepare the tenant patrol newsletter;

- conduct a monthly meeting with the tenant patrol supervisors at Central Office; and

- establish a training program for tenant patrol members and supervisors.

It would be unfair, however, to expect volunteers to carry the whole burden at the local level. A patrol might number 100 or even more members, giving a few hours a week on various shifts in different buildings. Recruiting, scheduling even minimal supervision of members of the patrol, and filing reports necessary for insurance purposes require more work than can reasonably be expected of a volunteer. We have therefore authorized projects to hire one or two tenants as tenant patrol supervisors, working 10 or 20 hours per week at \$3.00 per hour.

The tenant patrol supervisor's job is not an easy one. Inevitably, some volunteers resent the fact that only one member of the group gets paid. This is particularly true among low-income persons who have generally been found difficult to organize for volunteer work and who often have a real need for supplementary income. However, this has proved to be much less a problem than we anticipated. Patrol supervisors, carefully selected by housing managers after consultation with members of the patrol, are often men or women respected as

community leaders. Most of them voluntarily put in more hours than they are paid for. On the whole the position has worked out well.

The careful choice of local tenant patrol supervisors is essential to good rapport with existing tenant organizations whose active support and sponsorship of the program are highly desirable. Quite commonly, in fact, the first steps toward a new patrol are taken after a manager, discussing security problems with the project tenant organization, mentions how tenant organization in other developments have helped to alleviate some of these problems. In other cases, unorganized tenants, petitioning the manager concerning security, supply the initial impetus. As a matter of fact, the patrol program successfully involves many men who are not organization-minded and have shown little previous civic interest. This is one of its most encouraging aspects.

#### Some Problems to be Expected

It would be misleading to assume that widespread tenant participation is generally easy to achieve or that it usually arises spontaneously. Sometimes there is outright opposition, even in projects that badly need a patrol. Tenants sometimes insist that it is the obligation of the housing authority or the city to supply all necessary protection, whatever the cost. We do not attempt to set up a patrol in the face of such opposition. Our very limited central staff can barely keep up with demands for advice from projects where tenants have expressed an interest in the program. Not infrequently, opponents become supporters when they see a successful patrol in operation in a neighboring project.

A more common problem than opposition is insufficient tenant participation that limits the program to only a few of the buildings in a development. While our experienced staff can be very helpful in recruiting, we can do no more than tenant interest permits. It is *the tenants'* program. Tenants set the hours and make most of the other decisions governing the local patrol. The pro-

gram can only go as far as they want it to go. This is entirely as it should be. Meaningful tenant participation must be voluntary.

Many of the patrols, working closely with the police, have been remarkably effective in reducing loitering, purse snatching, mugging, and vandalism. As trouble makers learn to stay away from buildings protected by the patrol, its members sit in the lobby and, well, "nothing happens." That is what they are there for. But it can be boring!

We have therefore authorized various aids designed to build pride and maintain interest. These include armbands, jackets, light refreshments, indoor-type games for patrol headquarters, etc. Awards, testimonial dinners, and other forms of recognition are also helpful. In the long run, however, a patrol will last only if it brings a continuing sense of satisfaction to its members. Practically speaking, this means that a social component must be built in.

To this end, we provide a room for the patrol wherever possible. Unused carriage rooms located off building lobbies are ideal for this purpose since they permit members to socialize and at the same time keep an eye on the lobby. Often, however, two or three tenants simply sit in the lobby, using a table and chairs we provide, and control access to the building. Women, too, find a place in the patrol and their very presence serves to counteract a fear psychology that might have been prevalent before the patrol became active in a particular project.

#### Social Benefits Weighed

The social aspect of the tenant patrol is important in a number of ways beyond the indispensable function of helping to maintain interest. It helps to build up tenant pride and civic interest. In some cases the local patrol headquarters has become a gathering spot for off-duty members and for teenagers involved in constructive activity. Moreover, as patrols have developed in this manner, fears that they might turn into vigilantes have diminished.

Close cooperation with police, primarily the housing authority's own force, but also municipal police, likewise helps to curb any latent impulses toward the vigilante spirit. Such cooperation is basic to the entire tenant patrol concept. Members are told at the very beginning that they are not expected to be policemen. Their job is to act as a deterrent, and to call the housing police if trouble develops.

We make it easy for the patrols to call the housing police by providing them with phones and in some cases walkie-talkies. All housing patrolmen are equipped with walkie-talkies, so that quick communication is assured.

The housing authority has not reduced police coverage where active patrols exist. Rather than act as substitutes, the patrols have increased the effectiveness of housing police, acting as eyes and ears for the uniformed patrolmen and giving them the feeling that they are backed up by a group of responsible, interested tenants.

There can be no universal formula for the setting up of tenant patrols. The tenants are the first, and major, variable factor. Even where local conditions obviously require additional security measures, their willingness to volunteer determines whether a patrol can be established at all; they set the hours of operation and the program of patrolling—whether lobby attendant, escort service, outside patrol, building patrol, or a combination of these methods.

The tenants will probably be guided by the size and layout of the buildings in deciding upon the most suitable methods of patrol for their development. In New York City, high-rise buildings averaging about 130 apartments are common. Such buildings, with their large number of tenants and sizable lobbies, are well-adapted to a system of control by lobby attendants. We also have projects made up of low-rise buildings; in these, escort service (for the elderly, or for working women coming home from late shifts, etc.) from one or more central points has been found very useful.

### Senior Citizens Play Role

One of the unforeseen aspects of the tenant patrol was the extent of participation by senior citizens. They sit in the lobbies of high-rises, teamed up with younger men, or help to man patrol headquarters. At the other end of the scale, youth patrols are better suited to escort service, or outside patrol. Thus, the kind of manpower available may influence the kind of patrol that is set up.

For those who have taken part in it, the growth of tenant patrols in New York city housing projects has been an exciting adventure. Wherever the patrols were given a fair try, they have contributed greatly to project security. Moreover, while the size and quality of the patrols vary greatly from place to place, they have all, to some degree, provided a meaningful additional avenue for tenant participation in project life. Many tenants are learning that working together with management they can indeed be effective in improving their environment. *(This may be the most significant outcome of the program.)*

### New Security Measures Under Review

In another direction, the New York City Housing Authority has underway two experiments growing out of its relationship with Professor Oscar Newman of the Institute for Security Design. The first of these involves the application of his defensible space concepts to a row type garden apartment complex (Clason Point Houses) as part of a modernization program. It is too early to assess the impact of these changes on the total security of this development. Preliminary indications, are however, that significant changes have taken place in the incidence and profile of crime there.

The other experiment, at our Bronxdale housing development, involves installation of electronic surveillance and sensing equipment in selected buildings of a typical seven story, 28-building, elevator-equipped development. These devices are part of an overall space modification system using Professor Newman's defensible space concepts again. This

experiment involves the installation of television cameras in modified building entrance lobbies and the elevators of selected buildings. The television receivers in the tenants' apartments may be tuned in on a special channel to receive the signals from these cameras. Thus the tenant may see a visitor on his TV set before operating the door buzzer to let him in. He may also follow the progress of his visitor into and out of the elevator. The tenant thus has not only aural but visual contact with any would-be visitor. Also, at strategic locations, other TV cameras are placed so as to "sweep" and "zoom" the various walks and building entrances. These cameras feed into a central console manned by a tenant patrol member. Other parts of this experiment involve devices which permit audio monitoring of an elevator from the various floors and monitoring corridors by devices installed on the apartment doors.

In the design stage is an experiment to test the effectiveness of a strategically located observation booth with a 360 degree revolving "zooming" TV camera mounted on its top. The booth and camera will be so located as to afford visual observation of a maximum number of building entrances. It will be equipped with a telephone for rapid contact with the police as well as the lobby patrols. It will probably be equipped also as a walkie-talkie base station.

The reader should not lose sight of the fact that these programs are based upon the installation of sound "hardware." A first line of defense in any building security program is a reasonably effective lock system and adequate lighting; and, finally, tenant patrols cannot substitute for basic uniformed police protection. ☞

*Mr. Granville is Deputy Director of Management in the New York City Housing Authority. He is indebted to Mr. Bernard Moses, Chief Manager, New York City Housing Authority, for his assistance in organizing material for this article.*



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