Glendale, Arizona Smart Policing Initiative

Reducing Convenience Store Theft

Smart Policing Initiative: Site Spotlight

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Smart Policing: Research Snapshot

The Glendale, Arizona Smart Policing Initiative (SPI) team addressed thefts at Circle K™ convenience stores using a problem-solving model. The Glendale team targeted thefts because they clustered at these store locations more than at other store chains, and because the crimes threatened the safety of both customers and Circle K employees. The team was also concerned about the potential for these offenses to attract more serious crimes at these locations, and because of the significant burden placed on police resources.

The Glendale SPI team conducted geographic information system (GIS) analysis to map call activity at convenience stores, met with Circle K management, completed Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) surveys of the stores, and conducted surveillance of the most active locations. Based on this work, the Glendale SPI team concluded that Circle K management practices contributed to the theft problem. These practices included inadequate staffing; failure to respond to panhandling and loitering; and violations of basic CPTED principles, such as product placement, line of sight, and lighting.

The team developed a multi-faceted response that included engagement of Circle K management, recommendations for improved store operation and design, prevention efforts targeted at youth, and suppression operations focusing on the most active locations. The team documented significant decreases in calls for service at three of the six target stores during the project period, resulting in the prevention of substantial costs to victims, the city of Glendale, and its police department. The Glendale SPI experience highlights a number of lessons that may be useful for other police departments dealing with this problem, such as likely convenience store reactions to police intervention efforts, the involvement of serious offenders in low-level crime, the relevance of CPTED, and the critical importance of active partnerships.

GLENDALE, ARIZONA SMART POLICING INITIATIVE: REDUCING CONVENIENCE STORE THEFT

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INTRODUCTION

The Glendale (AZ) Police Department and its research partners in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Arizona State University (ASU) sought to address crime and disorder at Circle K™ convenience stores. The Smart Policing Initiative (SPI)[1] team targeted this problem because it was chronic, placed a burden on police resources, and threatened the safety of both customers and Circle K employees. Indeed, from 2008-2010, a number of incidents occurred in the Phoenix metropolitan area in which thefts from Circle K stores escalated into violence.[2] The Glendale SPI team was concerned about this potential for violence and about the potential for Circle K stores serving as breeding grounds for more serious types of crime. The Glendale SPI team developed their initiative using a problem-oriented policing framework centered on the SARA model: **S**canning, **A**nalysis, **R**esponse and **A**ssessment.

I. OBJECTIVES 1 AND 2: SCANNING AND ANALYSIS

The Glendale SPI team achieved the scanning and analysis objectives during 20 hours of advanced training on problem-oriented policing using the model curriculum developed by the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing.[3]

During the ASU-led training, officers identified thefts at convenience stores as a longstanding problem that placed a burden on police resources and that could potentially attract more serious crime and violence. Analysis showed that a majority of the thefts were occurring at Circle K stores (much involving theft of beer).

Table 1 shows the results of this analysis, highlighting the top generators of calls for police service among the 65 convenience stores in Glendale from 2008-2010. Circle K locations held the top 10 spots, with several generating an enormous call volume—in some cases, more than 500 calls per year. Table 1 also shows the top call-generating, non-Circle K locations, including two QuikTrip™ stores (QTs) and a 7-11™ store. Their call volume was considerably less than the Circle K stores.

Some rough cost estimates demonstrate the impact of this call volume on police. Glendale data indicate that one call takes an average of 23 minutes of officer time. With an average officer salary of $46.26 per hour, the most active Circle K store has cost the Glendale Police Department an average of $8,368 per year just in officer time alone ([1,428 calls x $17.58]/3 years). Employing the same cost assumptions, the top six call-generating Circle K locations cost

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[1] The Glendale SPI team included two specialized units, each staffed with a Sergeant, six to -nine police officers, and a Civilian Community Action officer (CAT) specializing in crime prevention. The sector Lieutenant led the team, which also worked closely with the Department's lead crime analyst and property crimes detectives.

[2] The most notable of these cases involved a "Good Samaritan" getting killed after intervening to stop the theft (http://www.azfamily.com/news/local/Suspect-in-Phoenix-homicide-arrested-in-Mexico-122962593.html).

[3] See http://www.popcenter.org/learning/model_curriculum.

Table 1 Highest Generators of Calls for Service, 2008-2010, among Glendale (AZ) Convenience Stores					
Name	Address	Totals	2008	2009	2010
Circle K	4306 W MARYLAND AVE	1,428	381	555	492
Circle K	5880 W CAMELBACK RD	1,148	199	396	553
Circle K	5907 W BETHANY HOME RD	1,062	201	524	337
Circle K	5102 W CAMELBACK RD	1,020	304	434	282
Circle K	7428 N 51ST AVE	918	323	322	273
Circle K	6305 W MARYLAND AVE	880	273	331	276
Circle K	4648 W BETHANY HOME RD	861	282	306	273
Circle K	9002 N 47TH AVE	664	271	206	187
Circle K	6002 W GRAND AVE	527	163	159	20
Circle K	6937 N. 75th AVE	494	169	136	189
QuikTrip	6702 W. GLENDALE AVE	402	127	149	126
7-11	6010 W. BETHANY HOME RD	197	69	75	53
QuikTrip	5082 NW GRAND AVE	185	58	56	71

the Glendale Police Department almost $39,000 in 2010 alone.[4] Other crime-cost calculations can be generated. For example, the Urban Institute has calculated total cost of crime to victims in dollars by crime type, concluding that each violent crime costs $199,818, and each theft costs $2,388. Given that the top six most active stores generated 58 violent crimes and 1,559 theft crimes in 2010, these six Circle Ks generated more than $15.2 million in total crime victimization costs that year.[5]

In addition, the Glendale SPI team engaged in geographic information system (GIS) analysis to map convenience stores and their call activity. Figure 1 depicts the results of this analysis. Circle Ks are represented as stars, and the other convenience stores are represented as dots. As

[4] The Glendale Police Department provided these salary and call-time estimates. The cost estimates only account for officer time (salary) and some overhead (equipment, fuel, etc.). Related police costs to dispatch, supervise, and process reports—as well as downstream costs for any calls that result in arrest and prosecution—would add significantly to these estimates.

[5] The victimization costs were calculated by John Roman at the Urban Institute, based on economic damages in jury awards, as well as on injury data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's National Incident-Based Reporting System. The violent crime amount is an average of the costs of robbery, aggravated assault, assault, and simple assault. The theft amount is an average of the costs for shoplifting, theft from a building, theft from a coin-operated machine, and all other larceny. For more detail on the Urban Institute calculations, See Roman (2009) *What is the Price of Crime? New Estimates of the Cost of Criminal Victimization*. Washington, DC: Urban Institute.

the legend indicates, the size of the star or dot indicates the size of the problem during 2010. Clearly, there are numerous intersections where high-volume Circle Ks are located right next to stores with few calls for service ("big stars" surrounded by "small dots"). These data indicate that call volume at Circle K locations is not explained by neighborhood crime levels.

Figure 1
Glendale (AZ) Convenience Stores by Location, Type, and Calls for Service (2010)
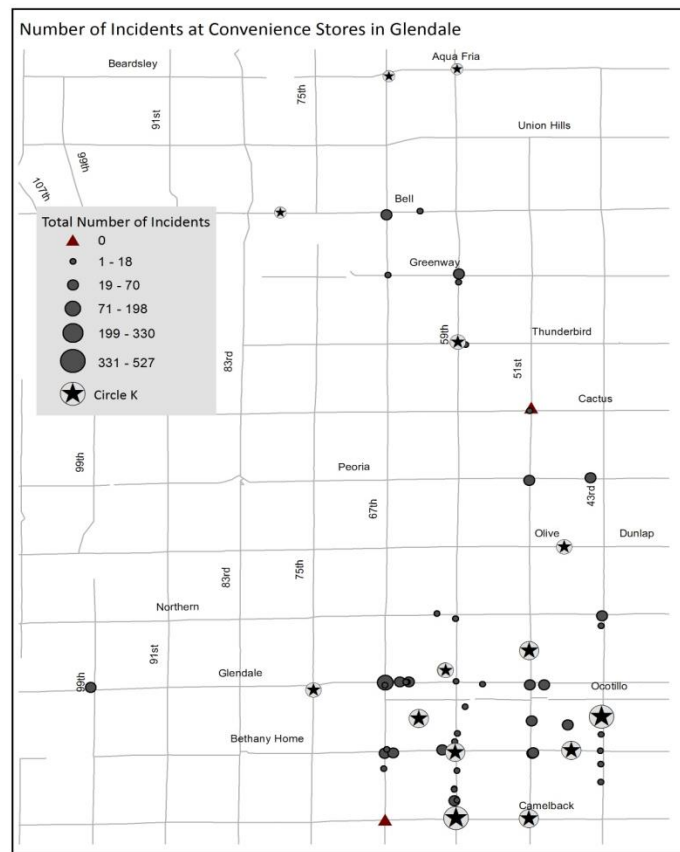
Last, the Glendale SPI team conducted additional analysis, which included meeting with Circle K management, conducting Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) surveys of the stores, and conducting surveillance of the most active locations. Based on this work, the Glendale SPI team concluded that Circle K management practices were largely responsible for the theft problem. These practices included inadequate staffing, especially during high-risk theft times; failure to respond to panhandling, loitering, and graffiti; and violations of basic CPTED principles, such as keeping open lines of sight, employee personal items stored in plain view, and placing products in at-risk locations.

II. OBJECTIVES 3 AND 4: RESPONSE AND ASSESSMENT

The Glendale SPI team developed a multi-pronged response plan to address the theft problem at the six most troublesome Circle K locations.

Response 1: Intervention with Circle K

The Glendale SPI team made numerous recommendations to Circle K to alter these practices (e.g., the team sent CPTED reports to the Circle K Loss Prevention Supervisor and management, and made recommendations verbally during in-person meetings).

Assessment

The Glendale SPI team's intervention efforts with Circle K produced mixed results. On one hand, there were some clear victories. Circle K loss-prevention staff provided training to SPI officers with regard to access and use of the store surveillance systems,[6] they began sharing information and working with detectives to identify repeat offenders, and they participated in suppression efforts (e.g., Operation Not-so-Convenient—see "Response 3" section below). The team achieved sporadic success with some CPTED approaches, such as the removal of beer from the floor at a few stores, and posted trespassing signs at all stores.[7] For the most part, however, the Glendale team experienced

resistance from Circle K management. Straightforward CPTED recommendations were often ignored, especially those that required a financial commitment. For example, Circle K management refused to increase staffing during "hot times" because of the additional cost associated with a second employee.

The SPI team adopted two approaches in response to the resistance from Circle K's management. The first involved the creation of a working group of law enforcement agencies in the Glendale area, including departments in Mesa, Tempe, Peoria, and Phoenix. The working group served to increase leverage on Circle K through a collective voice. The ASU research partners collected call-for-service data from all the agencies in the working group and produced a multi-city convenience store theft report, which demonstrated that the experiences in Glendale (e.g., the preponderance of criminal activity at Circle K stores) were common to other cities, as well.[8]

The Glendale SPI team's second approach involved presenting the multi-city report to the local media, which resulted in both print and television stories focusing on the Circle K theft problem (e.g., public shaming).[9] These strategies were effective both in getting Circle K management back to the table and involved as

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[6] Prior to this training, officers who responded to a call at a Circle K would have to wait until a manager accessed the system and provided a still photo of the suspect. After the training, the responding officers could access the system, themselves, and download a photo immediately.

[7] Circle K management also assisted in the development of a victim impact statement to be completed and submitted at court hearings of theft suspects.

[8] For a copy of this report, see http://cvpcs.asu.edu/sites/default/files/content/products/CVPCSreport_convstore_2011_3PDs.pdf.

[9] For examples of media coverage, see http://www.abc15.com/dpp/news/region_southeast_valley/mesa/report%3A-valley-circle-k%27s-are-hotspots-for-crime; http://www.azcentral.com/community/glendale/articles/2011/07/10/20110710asu-study-circle-k-police-calls.html.

a stakeholder, and in re-starting the discussion over the modification of management practices.

Response 2: Prevention

Results from analysis and targeted suppression efforts quickly demonstrated that juveniles committed a significant number of the thefts (approximately 25 percent). As a result, the SPI team developed a number of prevention strategies to deliver a clear message about the seriousness and potential long-term consequences of this crime. The centerpiece of these efforts involved a partnership with the Glendale Mayor's Youth Advisory Commission, as well as the development of a video public service announcement.[10]

Assessment

Assessing the impact of longer-term prevention strategies is difficult, and these efforts are ongoing. The team continues to monitor the demographic profile of known Circle K store theft offenders to identify any notable shifts in the commission of these crimes by youths.

Response 3: Suppression (Operation Not-so-Convenient)

The Glendale SPI team carried out intensive surveillance and enforcement operations at the targeted Circle K stores, called "Operation Not-so-Convenient." This operation took place over nine consecutive weekends in August and September 2010, followed by periodic weekends throughout 2011. The operation included the use of undercover and marked cars, Circle K loss-prevention staff, dispatch, and the research partners (who debriefed arrestees at booking).

Assessment

Operation Not-so-Convenient led to 57 arrests, including 15 felonies, and nearly $1,000 in recovered merchandise. Perhaps more importantly, of the 57 arrests, 48 had been adjudicated by the courts by December 2011, resulting in 37 convictions (77 percent conviction rate among adjudicated cases, with several jail and prison sentences).[11] Also, it is clear that many of these thieves were not first-time or low-level offenders. About 50 percent of the arrestees had priors, and 10 percent had prior serious arrests (Part I Crimes). Four had outstanding warrants, and two offenders had been released from state prison less than two weeks before their "Not-so-Convenient" arrests.

The Glendale SPI team also examined the impact of the initiative on calls for service at the six target Circle K stores in comparison to other convenience stores in Glendale. Table 2 shows the average monthly calls for service by store location in the year preceding the Smart Policing Initiative (August 2009 – July 2010) and the year during the initiative (August 2010 – July 2011).[12] The last column shows the change in average monthly calls over time. The six

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[11] At the time this report went to print, only 2 of the 57 arrestees had their cases dismissed. Several defendants were wanted on warrants, or their cases were still working their way through the court process. As a result, the conviction rate has likely increased. The sentences include three prison terms (e.g., 17 years for an armed robbery suspect) and two county jail terms. The high conviction rate is likely tied to suspects being caught in the commission of the crime, and in the recovery of the evidence.

[12] Analyses will be expanded to the year after the Smart Policing Initiative ended, as well (August 2011 – July 2012).

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[10] See http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQZ6s2BTAo8.

target Circle K stores are listed first, followed by several other non-target Circle Ks in Glendale, and a handful of other locations (in the interest of space, all 65 convenience stores are not shown).

There were notable drops in calls for service at three of the six target stores (decline of 19 percent, 31 percent, and 60 percent). Additional analysis revealed that the differences in impact among targeted stores were tied to better adherence to CPTED requests and the prevalence of arrests during suppression operations (see further discussion below). Also, a quick review of the patterns at the other convenience stores suggests that the trend at the target Circle K stores was relatively unique and not part of some larger crime trend at convenience stores or in the general area.[13] With regard to cost, the reduced call volume at the target stores led to a one-year decrease of more than 18 percent in direct costs for officer response (from $38,851 in 2010 to $32,153 in 2011, an immediate savings of more than $6,700). Drawing on the Urban Institute victimization costs again, in 2011, the six target stores experienced 51 violent crimes and 1,344 theft crimes, at a cost of $13.3 million (recall that the 2010 figures included 58 violent crimes and 1,559 property crimes, at a total cost of

$15.2 million). In other words, these reductions led to an estimated decrease of more than $1.9 million in victimization costs.

III. LESSONS LEARNED

For the Police Manager

Recognize Different Mindsets: The convenience store industry is driven by revenue. Much like any other private-sector entity, industry leaders think and act based on profit, which differs from police perspectives and approaches. For example, when police suggest adding a second clerk during "high-risk" theft times based on evidence, the convenience store management thinks about how much such a change would cost. From the corporate perspective, revenue rules the operational tempo, and any attempt to implement strategies that impacts the bottom dollar will likely meet with resistance. This can be frustrating and, at times, can create conflict within the working group. The key issue for the police manager is to keep an open dialogue with corporate peers to help them understand the police department's goals, as well as the significance of the partnership for each stakeholder.

Be Prepared for Arguments: There are a number of arguments that the convenience store management may make to justify why crime is a problem at their stores. Police departments can be prepared for these arguments and can refute them with data. A few examples illustrate this point.

a. "Our stores are in high-crime areas." This can be examined with GIS mapping (see Figure 1).

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[13] Although not shown here, the Glendale SPI team conducted an analysis of calls for service in the areas surrounding the target Circle K stores during this same time period. Results showed that calls and crime trends in the area were flat. We also examined the patterns at all convenience stores in the city, and again, the trend is generally flat. There is a notable drop in one Circle K store that was not a target store (6305 W Maryland), but this location is about two blocks from a target store. It is unclear whether this may be explained by diffusion of benefits, or something else.

b. *"Our stores do not make enough profit to invest in CPTED changes."* Most CPTED changes cost little, and they are evidence-based (lighting, line of sight, etc.). This argument can also be refuted by explaining the disproportionate cost on the police in terms of resources, absorbing calls for service, etc. (not to mention the public safety and victimization costs).

c. *"Our stores have more foot traffic and customers than other convenience stores."* This can be refuted with Tax Assessor data on store revenue.

Table 2 Impact on Calls for Service at Glendale Convenience Stores			
Store Location	8/09-7/10	8/10-7/11	Change
SPI stores			
4306 W Maryland	47.8 (574)	38.8 (465)	-9 (19% drop)
5880 W Camelback	43.4 (521)	44.3 (532)	---
5907 W Bethany Home	44.2 (530)	17.9 (215)	-26 (60% drop)
5102 W Camelback	30.4 (365)	21.1 (253)	-9 (31% drop)
7428 N 51st Ave	20.3 (243)	24.1 (289)	+4
4648 W Bethany Home	21.0 (252)	20.8 (249)	---
Non-SPI Circle Ks			
6305 W Maryland	26.8 (332)	17.2 (206)	-9
9002 N 47th Ave	16.1 (193)	13.1 (157)	-3
6937 N 75th Ave	14.5 (174)	17.4 (209)	+3
6002 W Grand Ave	14.2 (170)	18.2 (218)	+4
Other stores			
QuikTrip: 6702 W Glendale	11.9 (143)	12.3 (148)	---
QuikTrip: 5082 NW Grand Ave	4.1 (49)	5.4 (65)	+1
7-11: 6010 W Bethany Home	5.9 (71)	2.8 (33)	-1
Shell: 6705 W Bethany Home	3.3 (40)	2.9 (35)	---
AM/PM: 9920 W Glendale	4.2 (50)	2.5 (30)	-1

Reach Out to Counterparts: If a convenience store chain is problematic in one city, it is likely to be problem in surrounding jurisdictions. As a result, one way to increase leverage is to build a collective voice with other agencies. A multi-agency working group can help confirm that the corporate culture and crime-control problems are pervasive. Such a group can garner much more attention and influence than any one agency acting by itself. Such a working group becomes very difficult for the store management to ignore.

Increase Chances of Success with Active Partnerships: Police are limited in what they can accomplish without active partnership from the convenience store corporation. The police manager should avoid getting overly frustrated and instead stay focused on the operational plan. The police manager should also document all aspects of the team's involvement with their corporate peers so that there is a written record of the partnership. The ultimate objective is to get the corporation to take ownership of the problem and to recognize its obligation to provide a safe environment for employees and customers. As the victimization estimates from the Urban Institute suggest, theft crimes have serious costs. However, successful crime-reduction efforts can generate large tangible and intangible savings for all stakeholders.

For the Line Officer

Low-Level Crime but not Low-Level Offenders: Many of the offenders who engage in low-level crime, such as beer theft, have extensive criminal histories (including past violence) and are likely involved in other more serious types of crime. Many also may have outstanding warrants, or they may be on probation or parole. The New York Police Department discovered this phenomenon in the late 1980s when they targeted turnstile jumpers in the subway, and the same pattern appears to be in play with convenience store thieves in Glendale. In simple terms, targeting convenience store thieves can be an effective strategy for arresting serious criminal offenders. Moreover, this arrestee population can become an important source of intelligence for other crimes and criminals. Indeed, on a number of occasions, Operation Not-so-Convenient arrestees attempted to garner favor with police by providing information on other criminal activity.

Deterrence Works: Three of six target stores in Glendale experienced a decline in crime. The crime decline at the three "impact stores" was likely tied to Operation Not-so-Convenient arrest patterns. For example, 72 percent of the arrests made during Operation Not-so-Convenient operations occurred at the three stores that experienced a decline. The remaining 28 percent of arrests occurred at the other three target stores. The effectiveness of Operation Not-so-Convenient suppression and enforcement at the impact stores likely sent a strong deterrent message to would-be thieves. In summary, officers who target convenience store crime should incorporate visible presence and proactive enforcement as centerpieces of their response plan. Would-be offenders can be deterred.

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Environment Matters: The three impact stores were also much more compliant with CPTED requests, compared to the other target stores. In particular, all three impact stores immediately removed beer from the floor, while the other stores did not. Impact stores also were receptive to increasing store staff, and those store personnel were more likely to quickly report trespassing and loitering to police. In short, effective CPTED management was tied to store-level differences in crime. As a result, line officers should work closely with clerks and managers at individual stores to educate them on CPTED principles, and to alter their store environment to reduce theft opportunity and to increase risk of detection for offenders.

Next Steps

The Glendale SPI team continues to work the Circle K theft problem. In late 2011, Glendale patrol officers were given "ownership" of specific Circle K stores. Officers spend their down-time completing paperwork in their assigned store parking lots with their "code two" lights on, providing a routine and effective visible deterrent.

In addition, the results from the initial SPI has led the Glendale team to specifically target repeat offenders and organized retail-theft rings, as many who steal from convenience stores in Glendale are high-volume offenders who 1) re-sell the merchandise, and 2) commit other more serious crimes on a regular basis.

Last, in 2012, Circle K announced plans to open a new store in Glendale. Negotiations between the Glendale Police Department, Circle K management, and the chain store's legal staff led to the agreement to close one of the high-crime stores (4306 W Maryland) before the new store opens, and to follow agreed-upon CPTED principles at this new location.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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