In 2010, the Philadelphia Police Department and researchers from Temple University’s Center for Security and Crime Science set out to test the effectiveness of three policing strategies; foot patrol, problem-solving, and an offender-focused strategy. This briefing reports on the findings from this experiment. The crime reduction numbers tell a story with some successes, but interviews and research from the field identify where some strategies could be implemented better in the future.

Problem-oriented policing and intelligence-led policing are two common themes in the current vocabulary of American policing. Recently, with the findings from the Philadelphia Foot Patrol Experiment, there has also been renewed interest in foot patrol.

Philadelphia Police and researchers from Temple University, with support from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, set out in the summer of 2010 to better understand the impact of these strategies, and specifically answer where and when they were most effective as tactics to reduce violent crime.

SELECTING TARGET AREAS

Violent crime incidents for 2009 were analyzed using an innovative two-stage statistical process to identify hotspot clusters of violent crime across the city. Clusters were required to have a minimum number of five violent felonies (homicide, aggravated assault and robbery) and 15 violent crimes (violent felonies and misdemeanor assault).

These violence hotspot areas were mapped and presented to police command staff. Regional Operations Commanders worked with District Captains to identify 27 areas suitable for foot patrol, 27 for problem-solving, and 27 where police would focus enforcement on violent repeat offenders. A random selection process was applied so that 20 areas of each type were selected for additional police activity, and seven of each area type would receive the normal police response.

WHAT DID THE OFFICERS DO?

There was considerable variation in foot patrol activity as the operational tactics were left to District Captains. Foot patrol officers usually (though not in one case) worked in pairs and were volunteers. Shift times varied by area, though there was a common aim of reducing violent crime and targeting the times of foot patrol to coincide with the periods of greatest violence. The general pattern was two officers, for 8 hours a day, five days a week.

Problem-oriented policing was conducted by district officers in collaboration with members of the community and the support of personnel from police headquarters from the PPD2020 team. Local initiatives to address the causes of violence varied across districts as problems were unique to each area.
Repeat violent offenders were identified by criminal intelligence officers and district personnel and details were passed on to command staff at the district level. The role of focusing enforcement activities on the identified individuals generally fell to officers assigned to a unit out of the normal shift pattern in each district who are tasked at the discretion of the District Captain.

WHEN DID EACH INITIATIVE TAKE PLACE?

With PPD's successful experiences with foot patrol in 2009, foot patrol sites were operational very quickly. The problem-solving and offender-focus sites required more organization and training, and so did not start until later in the experiment. The chart above shows weeks (vertical lines) from July 2010 through February 2011. Foot patrol ran for about 16-18 weeks, while offender-focus strategies ran from summer 2010 until February 28th 2011. Problem-solving activities took even more time to commence, with most sites starting in the late fall and continuing until February 28th, 2011.

WHAT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES TOOK PLACE?

The Temple University research team completed two community surveys (pre/post) as well as two surveys of PPD officers (some of whom were involved in the Smart Policing Initiative). Community surveys asked about perceived crime problems, as well as attitudes to policing and police strategies. Police surveys asked about attitudes to community collaboration, the role of evidence-based policies, and tactics that police should adopt.

Researchers also conducted fieldwork, spent time on the street with officers, interviewed foot patrol officers, attended problem-solving meetings, attended offender-focus briefings, and worked alongside headquarters personnel to understand the program implementation.

HOW WERE THE RESULTS ANALYZED?

We employed repeated measures multilevel modeling using contrast coding to analyze the results. Repeated measures multilevel models describe changes in an outcome measured at multiple time points for a given unit of analysis – ideal for this type of complex problem. We also controlled for trends over time and temperature (as violence is known to increase as it gets warmer). A more detailed paper is available from the research team.

WHAT WAS THE RESULT OF THE EXPERIMENT?

Offender focus areas were successful in reducing all violent crimes by 42% compared to the equivalent control areas. These violent incidents included homicide, robbery, and assaults - both aggravated and misdemeanor. The offender focus sites were even more
effective on violent felonies, reducing them by 50% compared to the equivalent control areas.

The foot patrol areas were not successful in reducing violence during the experimental period, nor were the problem-solving areas.

**HOW DO WE EXPLAIN THE RESULTS?**

The offender focus area results show that by focusing on a number of key offenders in the violent crime hotspots, officers were able to reduce crime significantly. The assignment of criminal intelligence liaison officers to districts was an important component of this strategy as was the use of officers who were not responsible for answering calls for service and could concentrate on apprehending key individuals.

With foot patrol, we were unable to replicate the successful foot patrol findings from the Philadelphia Foot Patrol Experiment of 2009. There are potentially three significant differences. First, the average size of the foot patrol areas used here was two to almost four times as large as in previous successful hot spots trials.

Second, each foot patrol area in 2009 used twice as many officers, i.e. four per beat, in two shifts, rather than the current experiment staffing of two officers per beat in one shift.

Third, the officers in the current experiment were not as measurably proactive as the rookies from 2009. Pedestrian stops increased around 5% in this experiment, while in 2009 pedestrian stops during the Philadelphia Foot Patrol Experiment increased 64%.

It may be that the officers in the current experiment were more focused on community liaison, were called away for other duties more often, or were less enthusiastic about conducting pedestrian stops.

With regard to problem-solving, fieldwork and surveys showed that at least eight of the problem-solving areas switched to a focus on nonviolent crime or quality of life issues during the experiment. This may explain the lack of overall significant reduction in violent crime in the problem-solving areas.

**BENEFITS OF AN OFFENDER FOCUS**

The offender focus strategy was the most successful approach. Beyond the crime reduction, additional benefits of a targeted enforcement strategy are that it is less intrusive for law-abiding citizens because it avoids the wholesale increases in pedestrian and traffic stops that are so damaging to police community relations and that produce large numbers of arrests and flood the criminal justice system. It may also increase the perception of the police as more procedurally just and improve community satisfaction with the police.

Finally, this targeted view did not produce immediate spatial displacement of crime.

**CONCLUSIONS**

By focusing police efforts on the problem people associated with the problem places, police can achieve significant crime reductions while potentially avoiding negative community perceptions of their actions. Additional research is needed that more precisely measures what police officers do while in hot spots if we are to develop greater insight into why some crime reduction tactics are more successful than others.

Details of this project are at [www.cla.temple.edu/cj/center-for-security-and-crime-science](http://www.cla.temple.edu/cj/center-for-security-and-crime-science). Project research team: Prof. Jerry Ratcliffe, Dr. Elizabeth Groff, Cory Haberman, Evan Sorg, Nola Joyce and Prof. Ralph Taylor. This project was supported by Grant No. 2009-DG-BX-K021 awarded by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Bureau of Justice Assistance is a component of the Office of Justice Programs. Points of view or opinions in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice or the Philadelphia Police Department.