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## Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department

### Situation

One of five police departments in the County of Mecklenburg, North Carolina, the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) offers a full range of police services to a population of 650,000 residents. The department employs nearly 2,000 staff members and has an operating budget of over \$127 million.

### Critical Issue

CMPD is dedicated to community problem-solving policing, which depends on developing collaborative partnerships with citizens and community agencies to develop short- and long-term solutions to crime and community disorder. An ongoing challenge the department faces is convincing the community that a problem actually exists and that their involvement is necessary for any solution to be effective.

With the help of renowned criminologists-including Dr. Herman Goldstein and Dr. Ron Clarke, experts in situational problem solving-the department identified two areas where reported crime is high and community involvement is critical to developing a solution:

- Theft of appliances from residential construction sites
- Larceny from autos in uptown parking lots

### Solution

Using SPSS, CMPD completed extensive data analysis to document and analyze the multiple variables associated with these problems, as well as assess citizen satisfaction with community policing. The results of this analysis presented compelling evidence that community involvement was necessary to develop effective long-term solutions.

### Results

- [Improved community's ability to reduce theft of home appliances from residential construction sites](#)
- [Identified new ways to reduce larceny from autos in parking lots](#)
- [Increased ability to assess citizen satisfaction with community policing efforts](#)

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) is committed to the Community Problem-Oriented Policing (CPOP) philosophy, a holistic approach that regards crime as a community problem that requires citizen involvement and careful analysis of information surrounding the issue. The process seeks long-term solutions to crime by identifying its underlying causes, educating the community on the extent of the problem, and then working with the community to develop collaborative solutions that effectively address these causes.

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The cornerstone of this approach is the establishment of collaborative, problem-solving partnerships between the police, citizens and relevant public and private service providers.

"For community policing to work, everybody has to be involved and have a stake in their own personal well being," says Amanda Neese, associate, research and planning at CMPD. "Our job is reducing crime, and to be successful, we need to educate the public about the problem so they can take ownership of it and become part of the solution."

Situational problem solving is an integral part of community policing. By viewing themselves as problem solvers and catalysts for long-term change, police officers work with the community to develop solutions that are sustainable over time without major police intervention, rather than provide quick, temporary fixes.

### **Improved community's ability to reduce theft of home appliances from residential construction sites**

An example of situational problem solving in action is residential construction site theft. In recent years, many builders in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area were experiencing major problems with theft, particularly home appliances.

CMPD needed hard evidence to convince the builders that they could take action to reduce the likelihood of future incidents. Many contractors would simply absorb the cost of the theft without taking any precautions.

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*Once they saw it in black and white, they really took notice and were willing to help."*

In conjunction with geographic mapping, the Research Planning and Analysis Bureau (RPAB) of CMPD used SPSS solutions to provide contractors with concrete evidence of when the break-ins were occurring. For example, RPAB was able to show a positive correlation between the certificate of occupancy-the permit issued to new owners before they move in-and theft of appliances. Says Neese, "Using these results, we were able to prove to contractors that when certificate of occupancy was high, theft was high-when someone's getting ready to move into a house, the probability of theft increases because the appliances are already installed."

To deter theft, police advised builders to lock appliances in rented metal storage lockers and to wait until the day before closing before installing appliances. They also encouraged builders to keep construction areas under surveillance and well lit. Many builders have agreed to implement these suggestions and have reported a decrease in the amount of theft.

### **Identified new ways to reduce larceny from autos in parking lots**

SPSS also was instrumental in convincing the community to become involved in another key policing project: reducing larceny from automobiles in parking lots. "The most cost-effective solution to this problem is getting the community to take ownership of it-it's much more expensive to increase the number of police officers on patrol than to have parking lot owners take control of their environment and improve security," says Matthew White, management analyst at CMPD. "The problem is, parking lot owners have been really resistant to make any changes to the environment, that is, until we provided them with hard evidence of the problem. Once they saw it in black and white, they really took notice and were willing to help."

To provide such evidence, CMPD used SPSS to perform analysis that evaluated the relationship of larceny to such variables as the presence of lighting, fencing,

attendants, railways, overpasses and homeless pedestrian traffic.

Armed with this evidence, the department is educating parking lot owners about the problem and is working with them to take active theft-prevention steps. Officers now work with parking lot owners to implement changes designed to reduce the possibility of theft, such as increasing lighting or having an attendant on duty. "Parking lot owners have been pretty cooperative and the changes have been successful," says Neese.

### **Increased ability to assess citizen satisfaction with community policing efforts**

To better understand whether community policing efforts are successful, CMPD conducts an annual citizen satisfaction survey. It sends 100 surveys randomly to citizens of each of its twelve police districts, for a total of 1,200 surveys. Questions are designed to solicit satisfaction levels with policing services.

"We believe that community policing is doing well overall; for example, when we asked citizens if they're satisfied with how police serve their neighborhoods, 82.6 percent reported being either satisfied or very satisfied," explains Neese. "But there are areas where we can improve; for example, when we asked them if they are fearful of crime in their neighborhood, we found that 52 percent are somewhat or very fearful, so we know there are some neighborhoods where officers need to be more visible."

CMPD regularly uses SPSS to analyze survey data and improve community policing efforts. "We create a report that we distribute to the chief and command staff," says Neese. "They in turn disseminate it to the police officers and work with them to identify ways to better perform community policing efforts for the citizens."

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