

Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department
West Hollywood Station



CLEAN & SAFE CITY TASK FORCE

Project Summary

(Project Summary)
Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department

"CLEAN & SAFE CITY TASK FORCE"

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION (SCANNING)

There are over 38,000 residents who live in the City of West Hollywood's 1.9 square miles, 85% of the residents are renters. Additionally, the population is never less than double or triple that figure, due to visitors and tourists. It among the most densely populated areas in Southern California and is internationally known for its entertainment venues, shopping, and nearly 200 restaurants and nightclubs.

Drugs addicts, squatters, criminal transients, and slumlords had gradually gained a foothold. Broken windows and dilapidated buildings contributed to the perception of fear and decreased the quality of life in the city. Residents and business people were frustrated, afraid, and enraged. City Hall found the situation intolerable, as did the Los Angeles County Sheriffs deputies contracted to be the sole police agency for the city.

It wasn't that the public entities weren't trying. For years, deputies consistently made numerous arrests at locations where they were so easy to make, they were euphemistically known as "cherry patches." City Hall simultaneously fielded incessant complaints about unsafe conditions. City departments sued slumlords to force corrections, but slumlords successfully delayed the court hearings. Meanwhile, arrests by deputies for narcotics offenses continued unabated, as did calls.

In early 1995, the City received matching funds from the Federal Crime Bill for six deputy sheriffs and a sergeant named the Community Oriented Policing - Sheriffs (COPS) Team. Their overall mission was to "reduce the perception of fear" and to "involve the community and its resources."

COPS deputies immediately began meeting with community groups and city representatives. Deputies also attended Community Oriented Policing (C.O.P.) and Problem Oriented Policing (P.O.P) training and read literature to search for tools.

Scenarios similar to West Hollywood's were described in the "Public Affairs Comment" article; SITTING DUCKS, RAVENOUS WOLVES, AND HELPING HANDS: NEW APPROACHES TO URBAN POLICING by William Spelman and John Eck. They said, "few incidents are isolated; most are symptoms of some recurring, underlying problem... 'Incident driven policing'¹, the prevailing method of delivering police services, consistently treats symptoms, not diseases. By working with others to identify, analyze, and treat the diseases, police can hope to make headway against crime and disorder."

PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION (Cont...)

Deputies and City representatives set a goal to jointly focus on problematic locations. To remove criminals, not just arrest them, and repair and clean up the buildings so good tenants would move in. Research showed that by working on the core problems, criminal activity is reduced. Community leaders would be cultivated to keep deputies informed if problems began filtering back into the neighborhood. Most problems were forecasted to take 30-90 days to eliminate. While admittedly difficult to measure, the overall goals included reducing the perception of fear in the community, while reducing the crime rate.

ANALYSIS

Dozens of inter-agency and community meetings were held to identify where the problems were originating. COPS deputies proactively logged hundreds of directed patrol requests to help identify locations whose physical surroundings invited crime. Deputies sought out and worked with community leaders who were "doers" instead of just "talkers and complainers." By working together, everyone shared a role, were responsible for results, and were empowered to achieve and experience success. The information sharing strength and authority of the unified departments inspired everyone.

Although information was obtained from many community and city groups, by far the most effective group to meet was the **Clean & Safe City Task Force**, which included:

City Manager (City)	Public Safety Administrator (City)
Sheriffs Sergeant & deputies (County)	Building & Safety (City)
City Prosecutor (Private Contractor)	Code Enforcement (City)
Environmental Services (City)	Fire Captain (County)
Health Department (County)	Housing & Economic Development (City)
Landscape & Building Maintenance (City)	Parking Enforcement (Private Contract)
Planning (City)	Rent Stabilization (City)
Social Service (City)	Transportation (City)
Any Department/Agency that wants to attend	

SOLUTIONS (RESPONSE)

The Task Force quickly discovered the 26 worst buildings in the City were owned by the same slumlord. Each City Department had separately worked very hard to address his buildings with limited success. This included Sheriffs deputies making arrests, City Code enforcement getting court ordered sanctions, County Health Department citing violations, etc.

SOLUTIONS (Cont...)

Within a few months, COPS Team Deputy Bill Zimmer was able to get a parole hearing for the paroled drug offender slumlord. Deputies, City Code Enforcement, and others testified at the parole hearing and the slumlord was sent back to prison for eight months. Soon, City Code Enforcement and Building & Safety pressed hard and all the properties were placed into court ordered receivership and conservatorship. Without the slumlord to shuffle the criminals from one building to another to hide from persistent deputies, the bad guys had a problem.

Good neighbors kept in touch with City Hall and the Sheriffs Department, reporting the bad guys movements. Zero tolerance arrests increased for a while, then tapered off as the situation improved and it was more difficult to find arrests.

Deputies used innovative criminal and civil methods to remove criminals from other locations. This included contacting the owners of the buildings, "abatement letters" and "letters of agency." The Sheriffs Department also "advertised" its successful work with the city and community by regular press releases.

TOOLS - ABATEMENT LETTERS

Upon identification of a problem location, deputies identified the occupants, researched deputy logs and crime reports for the location, and empowered the neighbors to keep deputies informed of criminals movements.

By using the public nuisance eviction provision, deputies worked with neighbors to collect petitions declaring the location's occupants public nuisances. Deputies contacted the owner and explained to him/her that a public nuisance was present and if subpoenaed, deputies could testify to that effect. In the 78 abatements of 1995, this was sufficient to eliminate the majority.

For the remaining locations, a tersely written letter from Sheriffs Captain Richard Odenthal, declared the residents a public nuisance. The letter specified the crimes that occurred, and the legal authority of the declaration. In essence, it tells the owner to remove the occupants or face civil action. City Manager Paul Brotzman set aside a legal fund for the City to prosecute the owner if (s)he didn't comply, but no landlord has fought the letters, and no city funds were expended.

Owners had hesitated for concerns of being sued or harassed by the tenants. Understanding this, deputies maintained friendly terms and provided the letter seemingly as a courtesy to the landlord so (s)he would have legal justification. All were extremely grateful, especially when deputies volunteered to serve the letters on the criminal tenants. The time it typically took to remove problem occupants was 5-60 days. All were occupied by drug users, drug sellers, and prostitutes.

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TOOLS - LETTER OF AGENCY (TRESPASSING ARREST AUTHORIZATION)

Letters of agency permit deputies to make trespassing arrests without the owner being present to sign the private person's arrest. Over 100 active letters of agency exist and 90% of the letter of agency locations had their problem eliminated within weeks. Previously, there was rarely anyone present to sign the private person's arrests form, but plenty who were affected by the situation and called the Sheriffs Department.

Applying this to the slumlord's buildings, deputies obtained a "letter of agency" for each common area of targeted locations, as well as vacant apartments. The letters of agency were signed by the owners and court appointed receivers. Deputies simply went to the legally vacant units with pass keys and arrested the squatters for trespassing. Most were in possession of drugs or stolen property.

TOOLS - INFORMING THE PUBLIC

Informing the public was included in the plan. Deputies informed the media of successes while the city used the neighborhood watch newsletter and cable channel. Each story reflected the hope and optimism the public now feels towards their government entities ability to work together to solve problems. Deputies are routinely thanked by City officials and the public for the considerable and visible decrease in criminal activity, which is a considerable change from the comments heard just a few years ago.

RESULTS (EVALUATION)

Willoughby Ave. is home to only three of one slumlord's 26 apartment buildings. It is 15 blocks long, and has over 75 apartment buildings. Between the beginning of the Task Force in late 1994 and the last quarter of 1995, crime decreased 69% by focusing on only three targeted buildings. This impact was duplicated in dozens of other neighborhoods.

At the same time, City Code Enforcement, County Health Department, and other task force members had inspected the buildings with zeal, sometimes with deputy sheriff escorts. Corrections were made and the buildings were cleaned up. The slumlord was convicted of 28 code violations and the focused effort turned around 26 buildings and the surrounding neighborhoods. Three options became clear to the recalcitrants, go to jail, change their behavior, or go away. Although some displacement occurred, most resulted in breaking large networks into small ones that were quickly extinguished. Many slumlords sold their buildings to reputable owners and left the area.

RESULTS (CONT...)

Overall arrests were up for 1995 as compared to 1994, and theft arrests in particular were higher. However, narcotics arrests were in a downward trend in 1995. This is directly attributable to the decrease in the "source" locations within the city of West Hollywood.

SOME CRIME/ ARREST STATISTICS (West Hollywood)

	1994	1995	+/-
Arrests - Part I Crimes	689	743	+ 7.8 %
Arrests - Part II Crimes	3781	3826	+ 1.2 %
Thefts	1008*	999	- .9 %
Theft Arrests	191	244	+ 27.75%
Total Crime Reports	8259	8084	- 2.1 %
Total Arrests	4487	4587	+ 2.2 %
Total Arrest Ratio	54 %	56 %	+ 2 %

NARCOTICS ARRESTS (West Hollywood)

	1994	1995	
1st Quarter	136	195	Part I arrests: homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny theft, auto theft, arson, etc.
2nd Quarter	192	194	
3rd Quarter	201	145	
4th Quarter	184	99	Part II arrests: sex offenses, narcotics, drunk and drunk driving, all warrant arrests, etc.
Total	713	633	

* : 1994 thefts are for the Fiscal Year

If one looked only at the narcotics arrest statistics, one could argue deputies were not being aggressive in making arrests. However, community satisfaction had greatly increased. Overall station arrests increased 2% from the year before, and the arrest ratio of crimes committed increased. Thus, one could argue that the excellent progress had reduced narcotics activity to a degree that deputies could increase attention on crimes that had been previously sublimated as less important.

The Task force has not limited itself to one slumlord's buildings, as it continues to meet regularly to address problematic locations. A building has been bulldozed, County Health Department has shut down a diner for a month, vacant lots have had grass planted, etc. There have been no additional costs incurred by Task Force entities. In fact, on one visit to a problem building owned by a different slumlord, \$14,000.00 in code violation fines were levied (and later collected).

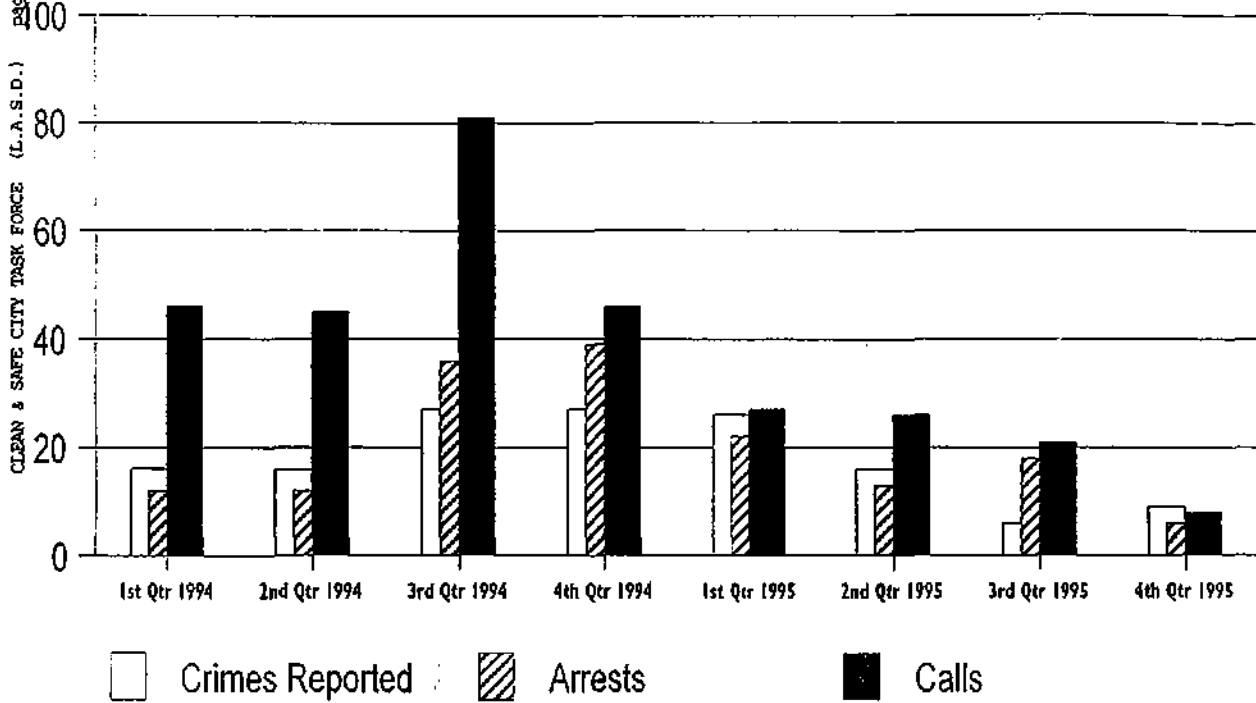


Willoughby Ave



West Hollywood (15 blocks)

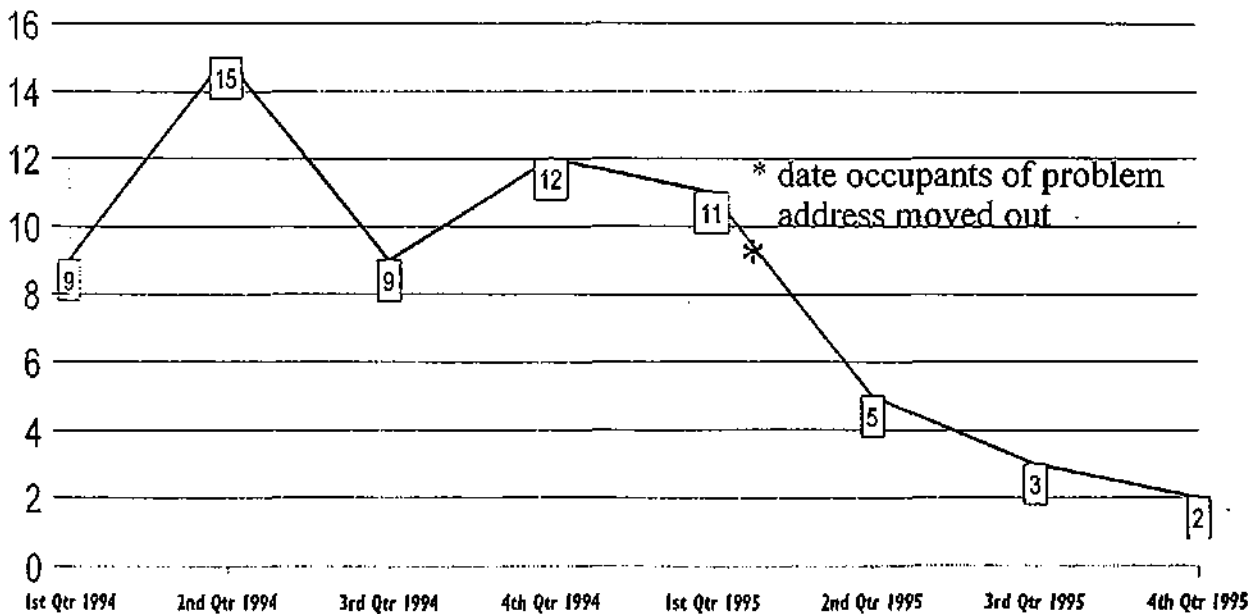
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Calls For Service



900 block Hilldale Ave



RESULTS (Cont...)

Improving the quality of life and reducing the perception of fear have been achieved and are reflected in dramatically reduced complaints of code violations and criminal activity directed patrol requests.

In 1993, a ballot initiative in West Hollywood reflected 47% of the voting public expressed dissatisfaction with the Sheriffs Department. In the summer of 1995, a professional survey revealed nearly three out of four residents felt Sheriffs Department services were much better or a little better than law enforcement in most other Southern California communities.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION (PHILOSOPHY AND ORGANIZATION)

Los Angeles County Sheriff Sherman Block has recognized, as did line level deputy sheriffs, that a fundamental change occurred in reducing deputies autonomy relative to other City Departments. But in so doing, in the long run it saves the deputies a lot of work. Community Policing says crime and disorder can be, and are, everyone's responsibility. This is not solely a Sheriffs department endeavor. Although deputies worked very hard, it is doubtful the "ravenous wolves" would have stayed away without the energetic, unified work by all entities.

One of the subtle but profound results has been communication, comradarie, and professional friendships. Members, don't wait for meetings to begin problem solving, and regular positive comments from the public show they have greater peace of mind and less fear in their community. The fact that many government entities have joined forces to help them, astounds them.

Having seen the effectiveness of this approach, deputies are changing their patrol habits and approaches to community problems, and are increasingly involved in the entire abatement process. As with many successful ways of gradually working towards solutions, if these methods were halted today, the success achieved would be slowly eroded. This is a long-term problem that has gone from disastrous proportions to a manageable maintenance, and new plans exist to address issues before they become such major problems.