

Regina Auto Theft Strategy

Regina Police Service, 2004

The Problem

In 2001, auto thefts in Regina, Saskatchewan reached unprecedented levels, leaving the city with the reputation of being Canada's "Auto Theft Capital". The drivers of stolen vehicles adopted dangerous driving behaviours, risking the lives of themselves and members of the public, and attempted to injure responding police officers.

Analysis

Data analysis indicated incidents of vehicle theft rose steadily from 1,471 in 1994 to 3,844 in 2001. Further analysis of criminal charges provided data supporting the conclusion that a relatively small number of repeat juvenile offenders were responsible for a disproportionately high number of offences. Enforcement alone did not appear to be sufficient to reduce the numbers of offences or change the behaviours of the repeat offenders. Public and media attention to this issue identified a high level of concern within the community.

Response

The Regina Police Service coordinated an initiative involving representatives from prosecution and corrections agencies, the automobile insurance industry, the school divisions, the media, and members of the public. This response focussed on four key areas:

- > Education and information directed toward the general public and young auto theft offenders.
- > Early intervention with first time auto theft offenders.
- > Coordinated supervision of repeat offenders.
- > Integrated and intensive supervision and case management of chronic repeat offenders.

The Regina Police Service initiated a three-tiered enforcement strategy to complement this effort:

- > Standard enforcement during periods of low activity.
- > Increased staffing levels and enhanced enforcement techniques when vehicle thefts increased.
- > Maximized staffing directed toward vehicle thefts combined with enforcement techniques designed to stop dangerous driving behaviour immediately during periods of peak activity.

Community partners created and distributed auto theft prevention information and provided anti-theft devices at no cost to vehicle owners. Insurers waived deductibles when anti-theft devices were used.

Assessment

The Regina Auto Theft Strategy achieved significant, sustainable results. In 2002, the first full year of implementation, 1,090 fewer vehicles were stolen than in 2001—a 28.4% reduction. A further 5.9% reduction occurred in 2003, when 162 fewer vehicles were stolen than in 2002. 1,252 fewer vehicles were stolen in 2003 than in 2001, marking an overall reduction of 32.6%

Scanning

During the mid 1990's there was a substantial increase in reported cases of auto theft in the city of Regina and the immediate surrounding area. The auto theft rate stabilized during the latter half of the 1990's and into 2000, then again started to rise. By 2001 Regina was firmly established as the "Auto Theft Capital" of Canada, having had the highest annual rate of reported vehicle thefts in Canada for more than five years.

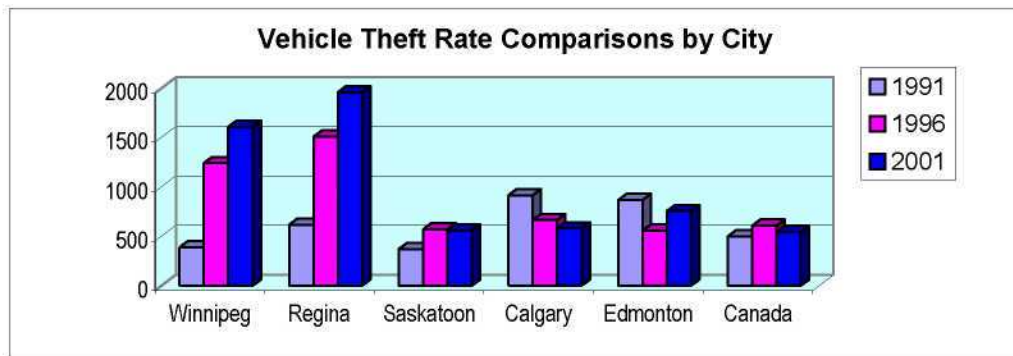
In 1992 Regina had a reported auto theft rate¹ of 490. This was below the Canadian national rate of 517 and placed Regina slightly above the median rate when compared to all major municipalities in Canada. By 1996 Regina's rate increased 307% and was the highest rate in Canada. The national rate increased by only 17% during the same period.

The rate of increase levelled off during the rest of the 1990's; however, each year Regina was still able to make the "claim" of having the highest auto theft rate in Canada. This issue raised a fairly high level of interest in the local media and stories on this subject were often broadcast and printed. The Regina Police Service, the main agency policing the Regina CMA, was reasonably successful in recovering most of the automobiles stolen from the area² and many offenders were arrested and charged. During this same time period the Regina Police Service deployed additional resources to the investigation of stolen automobiles and started to interact more often and effectively with other agencies in the community interested in, or involved with, the stolen auto "problem".

¹ Rates are calculated using a formula of reported incidents per 100,000 population. This is the standard used by Statistics Canada to measure and compare reported crime. In this submission, rates used are for the Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), which includes the major municipality in an area and all smaller surrounding communities.

² In 2000 only 2.8% of vehicles stolen in Regina were not recovered. The Canadian rate for non-recovered vehicles during the same time period was 30%.

In 2001 the rate of auto theft showed a dramatic increase of 24%. The rate of 1959 thefts per 100,000 population was 361% above the national rate of 542 and 22% higher than the rate of the second highest municipality, Winnipeg, Manitoba.³ The media started paying even more attention to the situation and citizens started to vigorously voice their concerns to municipal and provincial officials. Comparisons were made between Regina's rate of auto theft to that of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, a similar sized city situated approximately 250 kilometres (155 miles) north-west of Regina. Regina's rate was 350% the rate of Saskatoon. Regina's vehicle theft rate was also much higher than the rate in other large municipalities in same general geographic area in Canada.



In addition to the increase in numbers of vehicles being stolen, the driving behaviour of many of the operators of stolen vehicles escalated to the point where the safety of other users of the roadways was being placed at much greater risk. There were incidents of drivers of stolen vehicles searching out police officers and attempting to instigate high-speed pursuits, or in extreme cases, actually targeting police officers and attempting to injure them. Regina Police Service management developed an even more aggressive enforcement strategy to deal with the increase in reported crime and several community partners increased their level of participation to help address the stolen auto situation. The new strategy had the desired effect of

³¹ Winnipeg, Manitoba had a rate of 1608 automobiles stolen per 100,000 population in 2001.

apprehending a greater number of offenders; however, the numbers of vehicles being stolen did not decrease and it was becoming common to arrest the same individuals over and over again. Many of those arrested were young people, often in their early teens, and frequently facing charges related to dozens of stolen vehicles. The new strategy alone was not reducing the incidence of stolen vehicles. The streets of Regina were becoming more and more dangerous, both for police officers and the general public. Except for the city of Winnipeg, where the stolen vehicle rate increase mirrored that found in Regina, the dramatic increase in the number of stolen vehicles was not being experienced in other cities or regions in Canada.

Analysis

During the second half of 2001, managers and administrative support personnel at the Regina Police Service conducted an extensive statistical review in order to more completely understand the scope and particulars surrounding the stolen vehicle problem. Information learned was used to further refine the auto theft strategy, as it was clear the strategy, as it then was, did not produce the desired results of reducing crime.

The analysis showed most stolen vehicles were recovered, often the same day, or at least within the following few days. Additionally, charges against young offenders (12-17 years) comprised 83% of all vehicle theft related charges laid by the Regina Police Service. These statistics were in sharp contrast to the experience of other Canadian police agencies and indicated young people were responsible for stealing a major proportion of automobiles and that these thefts were not being committed for profit, but rather for "fun". An analysis of all persons charged during a seven-month period in 2001 indicated 20% of those arrested for stolen vehicle related offences had been arrested previously for similar offences during the same period. Many

of those arrested were charged with offences related to multiple incidents of vehicle theft. Investigating officers noted a significant number of offenders lived in disadvantaged social and economic conditions. The arrest statistics also showed a highly disproportionate number of persons of aboriginal descent were coming to the attention of police authorities. During interviews with accused young persons, police investigators learned groups were often playing games and having contests with each other in an attempt to steal a greater number of vehicles over a given time period than another group.

In June 2001, the Regina Police Service Crime Prevention Strategist facilitated a group session with several youth, either at-risk to commit and/or charged with stolen vehicle related offences. The session was conducted with the assistance of a local youth group. Community partners helped sponsor the event. Pointed questions about the young peoples' motivation for stealing vehicles were asked and candid responses were given. Following is a representation of some of the often-heard comments:

- > It's easy to steal cars.
- > The police won't chase when a stolen car is being driven in a dangerous manner.
- > They are bored and there's nothing better to do.
- > It's fun to steal cars.
- > They receive status from their peers when they're stealing cars and driving in a dangerous manner.

The young people were also asked; "What would stop you from ever stealing a car." The responses to this question included:

- > Being able to get a job, my own driver's licence and my own car.
- > Having a better role model.

- > Staying away from drugs, cigarettes and alcohol.
- > A different peer group.

On November 30, 2001, a "task force" comprised of representatives of agencies responsible for enforcement, prosecution, community corrections and detention was brought together to review the information gathered by the police and to discuss options for reducing vehicles thefts in Regina. This group also conducted a literature review that indicated recidivism rates in young people could be reduced by as much as 50% through the use of appropriate intervention strategies. It was also found the use of inappropriate strategies had no impact on recidivism rates. A "best practice" review suggested the following elements be included in any strategy to deal with young offenders:

- > Conduct a thorough risk assessment of the young offender. This assessment should identify dynamic risk factors.
- > Develop a case plan to systematically address the identified risk factors.
- > Choose the types of services that are capable of meeting the needs of an individual youth.

After conducting this review the task force developed the Regina Auto Theft Strategy.

Response

Prior to implementing the new strategy, the Regina Police Service, the Department of Corrections and Public Safety, and the Department of Justice held a joint news conference announcing the strategy and its desired effect. The news conference was attended by all media outlets and received wide coverage. A new assessment tool was also developed for use when evaluating the level of service a young offender would need to receive to address family,

behavioural and other issues related to their criminal actions. The tool was named the Level of Service Inventory - Saskatchewan Youth Edition (LSI - Sask.) and was adapted from a similar tool used by justice workers in Ontario.

The initial announcement of the strategy was greeted with a significant amount of criticism and scepticism and emanated from both political and media sources. The efficacy of the intervention strategies was questioned and a significant voice was raised in support of fewer programs and greater punishments, particularly in the form of strict-discipline boot camps.

Before describing the implementation of the Stolen Auto Strategy it is important to understand this strategy was designed after previous tactics and strategies had been designed, applied, evaluated and redesigned in accordance with information learned during the evaluation.

The Regina Police Service had been assigning significant resources to respond to vehicle thefts. Enforcement alone; however, was not sufficient to reduce the numbers of thefts. With the community expecting a meaningful response, and the police service doing everything in its lawful authority to respond, the only alternative lawfully seemed to require multi-agency participation. Because the analysis indicated repeat offenders were responsible for a significant number of vehicle thefts, prosecution and corrections practices needed to change in order for the youths' behavioural patterns to change. Following is a list of some of the approaches used and expanded upon while attempting to control the increasing incidence of stolen vehicles:

- > Enforcement strategies were conducted in an aggressive manner. The Stolen Auto Unit was given additional financial, human and equipment to help address the problem. Community partners provided some of these additional resources. A specialized team, known as Carwash, was established and given specialized training and equipment. The team was quite successful in arresting offenders;

however, many of those arrested continued with their unlawful behaviour when released from custody. The police alone could not control the problem.

- > Investigators approached prosecutors assigned to docket court and requested that habitual offenders be held in custody, or at least be subjected to restrictive release conditions. Prosecutors were provided additional information to give them "ammunition" when making these requests of the Court.
- > Free anti-theft devices were provided by Saskatchewan Government Insurance and distributed to members of the public by police and community partners during highly publicized events. When police investigators noticed unused devices in recovered stolen vehicles the insurance company implemented a policy of waiving the deductible when a vehicle was stolen in spite of using an anti-theft device.
- > Investigating police officers did not send any persons charged with a stolen vehicle related offence to pre-charge diversion programs, even first offenders.
- > "Curfew checks" were done in a regular and coordinated manner with youth workers and corrections officials. These checks were part of an initiative to enforce and supervise the release and probation conditions of youth charged with offences
- > The assistance of aboriginal communities was sought to help design and carry out "cultural camps" where young offenders could develop skills, identify with role models and be instructed on the destructive nature of their behaviour.

The strength of the Auto Theft Strategy is that it was simply the end result of a continual problem solving exercise where issues were identified, solutions sought, activities implemented,

evaluation conducted and then the whole exercise being done over again until desirable results were obtained.

This continuing process of analysis, response and assessment led to the Regina Police Service initiating a multifaceted, multi-agency response to vehicle theft. Identifying the prevalence of young offender involvement steered the response toward a four-tiered strategy designed to prevent youth involvement in these acts and, in cases involving youth already involved, implementing an incremental correctional process. The Regina Auto Theft Strategy was implemented in January of 2002 and is built upon the following four pillars:

1. Public education targeting vehicle owners and at-risk youth not yet involved in vehicle thefts.

The John Howard Society was contracted to develop and deliver a module in the city's elementary schools designed to educate and encourage children to avoid criminal involvement. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, through Project 6116, coordinated a project where youth created messages discouraging vehicle thefts. The Saskatchewan Association of Chiefs of Police Crime Prevention Practitioners sub-committee developed "Driving Down Auto Theft", an awareness program that distributes vehicle theft prevention information to residents, and supplies information to visitors through the Regina Hotels Association. Saskatchewan Government Insurance created the "Join the Club" program, distributing vehicle theft prevention information and free steering wheel locking devices to vehicle owners. Insurance deductibles were waived for persons who had their vehicles stolen while an anti-theft device was in active use at the time of the theft.

2. Early intervention with first-time offenders.

Research conducted by the Saskatchewan Department of Social Services identified the importance of early, meaningful intervention to successfully reduce recidivism. This research

led to the development of the "Help Eliminate Auto Theft" (HEAT) program. Prosecutors refer first-time offenders to this program within 48 hours of their arrest. Offenders are rated using the Level of Service Inventory - Saskatchewan Youth Edition (LSI) assessment tool, which provides information to assist the HEAT Coordinator in developing a specific intervention program for each offender.

3. Targeting repeat offenders through coordinated services.

Individuals identified as repeat offenders are assessed and monitored. Auto theft offenders are held in custody pending a court appearance. Prosecutors request "curfews" as part of any Judicial Interim Release. Once released from custody a team of officers from the Regina Police Service and the Department of Corrections and Public Safety monitors offenders to ensure court mandated conditions are being adhered to. "Curfew checks" that cannot be conducted by this team are forwarded to patrol officers, entered as a call for service, and conducted throughout the night. Individuals violating release or probation conditions are charged and immediately placed before the Court for further sanction.

4. Targeting Chronic Repeat Offenders through intensive supervision and management.

A joint committee of Department of Justice, Corrections and Public Safety, and police officials identify individuals who pose a significant risk to public safety as chronic repeat offenders. The majority of these individuals have experienced significant periods of incarceration and continue to offend upon release from custody. A database of chronic repeat offenders, including photographs, is maintained by the Regina Police Service, and is regularly disseminated to partner agencies and operational police officers to assist in identification of target offenders. When chronic repeat offenders are apprehended, they are charged with the maximum applicable offence and are held in custody pending a court appearance, at which time

prosecutors request they be held in custody pending the resolution of the charges. Upon conviction, corrections officials, using the LSI, implement a variety of programming interventions while these youths are in custody. Intensive supervision probation is instituted once they are released into the community. This supervision entails consistent efforts to ensure offenders abide by Court-imposed conditions including curfews and non-association orders. To that end the Department of Community Resources and Employment assigned two staff members to check "curfews" on a daily basis, with police officers assigned to the Stolen Auto Unit and patrol officers also conducting checks. Offenders found in violation of "curfews", or other conditions, are located, charged, and held in custody.

This four-tiered strategy is complemented by a three-tiered enforcement strategy.

1. Standard enforcement.

During periods of minimal vehicle theft activity, standard enforcement practices continue, with officers assigned to the Stolen Auto Unit conducting investigations and patrol officers responding to initial complaints. "Curfew checks" are conducted daily throughout all levels of enforcement.

2. Enhanced Enforcement

When incidents of vehicle theft rise, enforcement is enhanced both quantitatively and qualitatively. Additional members are assigned to the Stolen Auto Unit and members of the Canine Unit are redeployed to assist the Unit. Saskatchewan Government Insurance provides additional vehicles to the Unit as needed.

The officers assigned to the Stolen Auto Unit and all Regina Police Service supervisors receive training in techniques aimed at stopping vehicles safely. These techniques incorporate the use of stop sticks and spike belts. Known as the Carwash Team, members conduct

surveillance in unmarked vehicles. When encountering a stolen vehicle in operation, strategies to stop it safely, including boxing-in and pinning, are employed allowing apprehension of the offenders without risking a high-speed pursuit. Apprehended offenders are held in custody as specified in the four-point strategy.

3. Maximized enforcement

When vehicle theft activity reaches sustained high levels, the Stolen Auto Unit is augmented by the majority of members in the Criminal Investigation Division. These members work in support of the Carwash Team. Canine Unit involvement is maintained. A bait vehicle, with the ability to be deactivated remotely and equipped with a global positioning device is deployed.

To ensure sufficient information is presented by prosecutors to enable the Court to choose incarceration or intensive supervision as appropriate alternatives, police officers investigating vehicle thefts or recovering stolen vehicles are required to:

1. Photograph damage to recovered vehicles when arrests are made.
2. Attach a stolen vehicle statistical graph to each court report.
3. Record the cost to victims—including vehicle cost, repair cost, and lost wages—in each court report.

Informing the Court of the impact of vehicle theft on victims increases the likelihood of decisions favouring incarceration or intensive supervision.

Throughout all phases of the enforcement strategy, police and Corrections and Public Safety personnel continue with intensive supervision and monitoring of repeat offenders, conducting curfew checks and charging non-compliant offenders where appropriate.

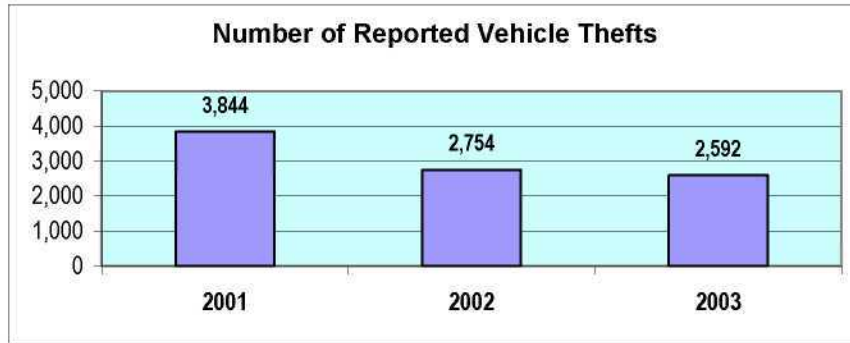
As it developed its 2002 Strategic Plan, the Regina Police Service established a goal to reduce by 25% the incidence of vehicle theft compared to 2001 levels. This target also became the target for the other members of the Auto Theft Task Force.

Members of the Regina Police Service received training in pursuit tactics and spike belt deployment, and were given detailed information on their roles and the strategy of the varying levels of enforcement. A management committee on vehicle thefts was created and began daily briefings on the extent of the problem and the enforcement efforts of the previous twenty-four hour period. This was designed to facilitate a forum for the rapid exchange of the information necessary when evaluating whether the current enforcement level is adequate or if an immediate change in response is necessary, in accordance with the three-tiered enforcement plan.

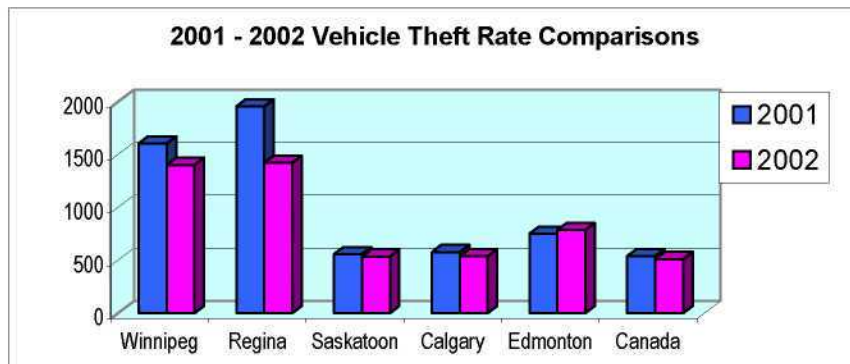
Assessment

Regina's Auto Theft Strategy has produced significant results since its inception in January of 2002. The response is evaluated on a daily basis, with managers receiving data on the number of vehicle thefts and persons charged. Monthly, this data is compared to the respective month from previous years, as well as earlier months in the same year. Annually, data is aggregated and compared not only to Regina figures, but also to other Canadian municipalities.

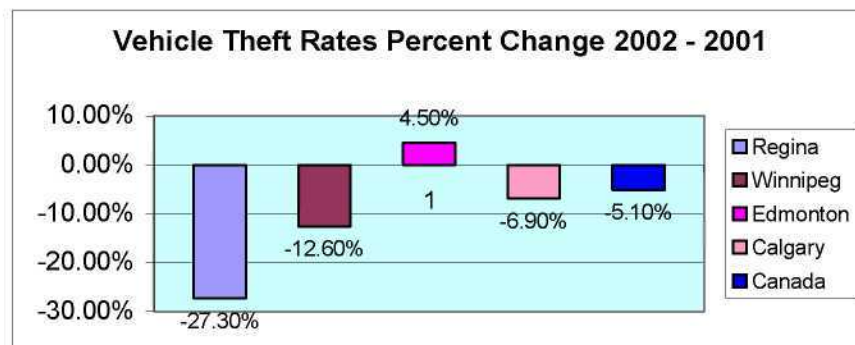
Reported incidents of stolen vehicles declined by 28.4% in 2002, from 3,844 in 2001 to 2,754 in 2002, exceeding the targeted reduction of 25%. The decline continued in 2003 with a further 5.9% reduction to 2,592 reported vehicle thefts. From the program's inception in 2002 until the end of 2003, annual incidents of vehicle theft declined from 3,844 to 2,592—a total reduction of 32.6%. At the same time, patrol officers reported a reduction in dangerous driving behaviours.



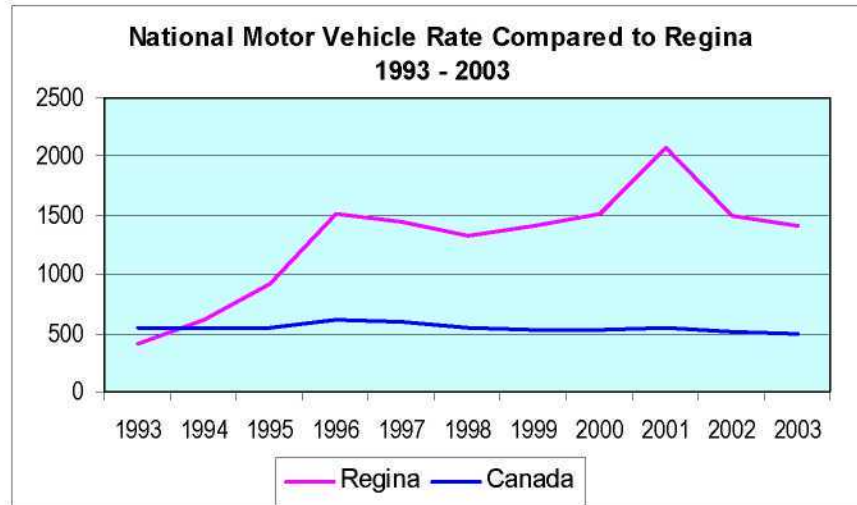
Annual national comparisons indicate Regina's vehicle theft rate, although still above the national average, has dropped significantly from its peak of 1,959 per 100,000 population in 2001, to 1,404 per 100,000 population in 2003.



Regina showed a significantly greater reduction in the vehicle theft rate (-28.1%) than other Canadian cities. The Canadian rate fell by 5.1%.



This reduction counters the trend of the previous ten years.



The Canadian Institute for Peace, Justice and Security, housed at the University of Regina, conducted an intensive evaluation of Regina's Auto Theft Strategy in 2002. In its conclusion Dr. Jeff Pfeifer noted:

Overall, it is clear that the Regina Auto Theft Strategy has been effective in implementing a number of innovative approaches and techniques to address the issue of young offender auto theft. In addition, it is also abundantly evident that the Regina Auto Theft Strategy was developed in an attempt to respond to the specific needs of the community, at-risk youth and young offenders in Regina. A review of the Strategy indicates a number of specific positive elements, including:

- *Demographic Applicability - Although it is clear that the strategy has been designed to meet the demographic, cultural and geographic specifications related to young offender auto theft in Regina, it is also clear that the strategy represents a base model for the development of similar strategies in other locales.*
- *Risk Assessment - The inclusion of a risk assessment component in a number of phases of the strategy indicates a keen awareness of the importance of gaining information on the needs of young offenders with respect to effective rehabilitation. The importance of risk assessment as a rehabilitative tool has been clearly defined by the research yet seldom is employed in non-custodial youth programs.*
- *Grass Roots Development & Ownership - A review of the strategy indicates that it was clearly developed through the collaborative efforts of a number of frontline workers. There is a clear indication that this approach to development has resulted in a program that: (a) addresses the needs of young offenders in a practical fashion, and (b) reflects a high degree of ownership from frontline workers.*
- *Multi-Agency Cooperation - The current strategy is also to be commended on the successful development and implementation of an initiative that combines a number of agencies. Although it is widely understood that effective responses to issues such as youth crime call for an integrated response involving a number of agencies, seldom does this occur due to administrative and other difficulties.*

Conclusion

In 2001 stolen vehicles were a large and growing concern in Regina. The driving behaviour of offenders was dangerous and put members of the police service and the general public at risk. A comprehensive and on-going problem-solving model was used to develop and implement the Regina Auto Theft Strategy. In one year the incidence of vehicle thefts fell 28.4%. The strategy continues to be used as a regular course of business and continues to show great success.

Agency and Officer Information

The Regina Auto Theft Strategy was developed in the Criminal Investigation Division of the Regina Police Service. Senior administrative personnel, including the Chief and Deputy Chief of Police were actively involved in providing direction and in working with senior officers from our community partners. All operational personnel, and some administrative officers are continually involved in the strategy in some form.

The Regina Police Service has adopted the problem solving philosophy as a key component to our community-policing model. The majority of operational personnel have received formal training in problem solving from recognized experts in the field.

No additional incentives were offered to members who participated in this strategy. There was an opportunity for Stolen Auto Unit members to earn overtime pay and all members received the intangible benefit of living and working in a safer community.

Problem solving exercises have been documented, stored and catalogued in Central Records for several years. These examples, along with materials received during training courses and information learned during independent research activities were all used.

No issues or problems were identified with the problem oriented policing model. Its application in the development and implementation of this strategy was very successful.

Most of the operational resources of the Regina Police Service were committed to this strategy at some point of time. The initiative was wide in its scope and intense in its application. Saskatchewan Government Insurance committed a number of vehicles to the Carwash initiative. The provincial government provided funding to hire three police officers that were assigned to the Auto Theft Strategy. Three additional officers were also redeployed to the Stolen Auto Unit from inside the organization. Two youth workers were hired to monitor offenders released from custody.

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List of Attachments

Regina Leader Post Newspaper Article - October 6, 2001

Regina Leader Post Newspaper Article - December 1, 2001 (2 pages)

Letter to the Minister of Justice for Saskatchewan

Regina Police Service News Release - May 3, 2001 (2 pages)

Regina Police Service Departmental Notice - April 25, 2001 (2 pages)

Level of Service Inventory - Saskatchewan Youth Edition (2 pages)