

# “Bulldozing” Construction Site Burglary in Port St. Lucie, FL

Port St. Lucie, FL Police Department, 2006

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**Scan:** The problem of crime at single family-home construction sites was selected because of the intense growth in Port St. Lucie, the large number of homes being built, and that this type of crime constituted a fairly large proportion of property crime. Members of the department saw it as a problem worth addressing because of the anticipated continued growth and its potential as an increasing and long term problem.

**Analyze:** The analysis utilized several data sources: police reports, data collected by officers, interviews and focus groups of staff, builders, and city building personnel, and observation of construction sites. Several conclusions were made from the analysis that shaped the responses:

- Large number of targets homes under construction.
- Crimes occur predominantly in the southwest section of the city.
- Twenty percent of builders victimized account for nearly 70% of the crimes.
- Low arrest rate.
- General construction supplies and equipment and appliances targeted.
- Over half of the crimes require the highest level of skill.
- Most of the property can be transported with a car or small truck.
- Many times property was taken when the house was securable.
- Electricity meter inspections are indicator of when the house is securable.

**Respond:** A multifaceted response plan was undertaken that included a general and a targeted approach. The analysis revealed the problem was focused in particular areas of the city, in later stages of building, and on particular types of property. We found that the responses necessary for this problem were techniques that the police alone could not implement. Therefore, our responses centered on shifting and sharing the responsibility of implementation with builders. General responses were developed and implemented in the high risk areas which included improvement of pattern identification and responses to patterns, educating potential victims and potential guardians, and increasing police guardianship through construction site checks. The analysis also revealed that particular builders were at higher risk of victimization. The PSLPD worked closely with several builders and responses were developed based on specific analyses of their victimizations.

**Assess:** The assessment shows a steady decrease in monthly construction site burglaries in the last two years even with building levels slightly higher. Results of the individual builders, reveals they too saw steady decreases in crime. Established and continued partnerships with CEOs, buildings supervisors, and the city’s building department are also an outcome of this project.

# “Bulldozing” Construction Site Burglary in Port St. Lucie, FL

## Scanning

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In 2004, the problem of crime at single family-home construction sites was initially identified by our police department as a problem to be addressed for several reasons. Port St. Lucie, Florida is approximately 100 square miles, 3rd largest in area in Florida, and it has a significant amount of undeveloped land. In April 2006, it was 141,000 and estimates anticipate an increase to 214,997 by 2016 (Florida Research and Economic Data Base, University of Florida). At the beginning of this project, city building department personnel estimated that between 450 and 600 new building permits were issued per month and estimates over 6,000 homes were under construction at any given time in Port St. Lucie. Crime at construction sites constituted a fairly large proportion of property crime occurring in Port St. Lucie and members of the department saw it as a problem worth addressing. Thus, this problem was selected because of the anticipated continued growth and building of homes in Port St. Lucie and its potential to be an increasing and long term problem.

Once the initial problem was selected, a team of officers, crime analysts, sergeants, and a researcher was formed to conduct the data collection and analysis, and recommend responses to command staff. By reading the crime reports as part of a preliminary analysis, we discovered that around one third of the incidents titled construction site burglary did not involve the taking of property, but were actually vandalism (e.g., holes in the drywall, graffiti, and general damage). This activity was excluded from the definition of the problem since the motivations and opportunities warrant different responses. Thefts were included since these are crimes in which property is taken from the construction site not from inside the home under construction. We

felts these crimes were similar to burglaries of homes under construction since many of the materials taken are left around the site before installation.

Consequently, the problem was refined to include only crimes in which property was taken from the construction site or the home under construction. The problem solving team decided to focus the analysis citywide instead of on a particular area or subdivision.

## **Analysis**

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### ***Previous Responses***

The Port St. Lucie Police Department had previously identified and addressed this problem through a process in which “strategic plan focus groups” (teams of police officers with interest in or expertise with a particular type of activity) were formulated to brainstorm and develop responses for a list of problems. The previous work was centered on developing and implementing responses to address the problem; however, little analysis was done to inform this work. Although several responses were attempted, they were not sustained or evaluated for their impact on the problem.

### ***Data Sources***

It was important in this project that the responses recommended to command staff be developed based on systematic, thorough analysis. Thus, the team created and examined a variety of data sources. They include:

- *Police reports:* Aggregate data such as date, time, location, property taken, and victim information were analyzed as well as the report narratives. Report narratives were also used to code the level of difficulty of each crime (see below). Only data from 2004 was examined for this analysis because of the time it took to read and code each police report.
- *Construction site burglary check sheets:* The problem solving team determined that additional information needed to be collected for analysis at the scene by responding officers. A check sheet was added to the police report to be filled out for every reported construction site burglary that asked questions specific to this crime. Analysis of six

months of data (June through December 2004) was conducted; however, the check sheets continued to be completed in 2005 and 2006.

- *Observation:* Direct observation was used to glean qualitative information about construction generally as well as the nature of the construction sites that were victimized.
- *Focus groups/interviews:* Several focus groups were held with builders in Port St. Lucie to discuss their building practices, their experiences and responses to construction site crime. Interviews with building department personnel and individual builders' CEOs were also conducted to determine building department practices as well as experiences and insight into the problem. Officers and detectives with expertise in construction site burglary were interviewed as well.

## **Hypotheses**

A review of literature of construction site burglary revealed few studies have been conducted on this problem. The most notable study was conducted by Ron Clarke and Herman Goldstein in Charlotte, NC. Members of the problem solving team utilized this study, discussion with other agencies dealing with construction site burglary problems, and our own experience, to develop the following hypotheses to guide the analysis:

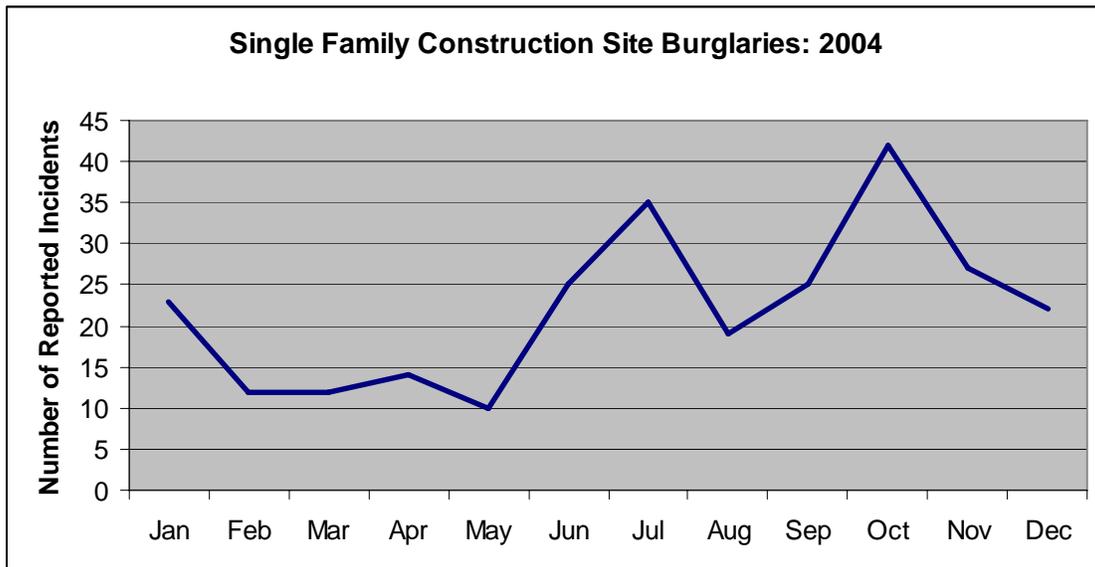
- *Trollers:* Individuals drive around/walk around neighborhoods looking for the opportunity to take property from construction sites for resale or personal use. These can be anyone from people living in the neighborhood to people from out of town.
- *Insiders:* Builders and subcontractors steal from one another to use the stolen property in ongoing work and to sell. These individuals either work on the site that is victimized or have some inside knowledge of when property is being delivered, when it is vulnerable, and how well the sites are protected.
- *Professionals:* These are individuals who make a living at burglary and selling stolen goods. They plan their crimes and tend to have intricate knowledge of the environment and areas where they commit their crimes.

It is probably the case that all three types of offenders are part of the problem in Port St. Lucie, but it was the goal of this problem analysis to determine which is most prevalent in order to prioritize and tailor responses accordingly.

## Analysis Results

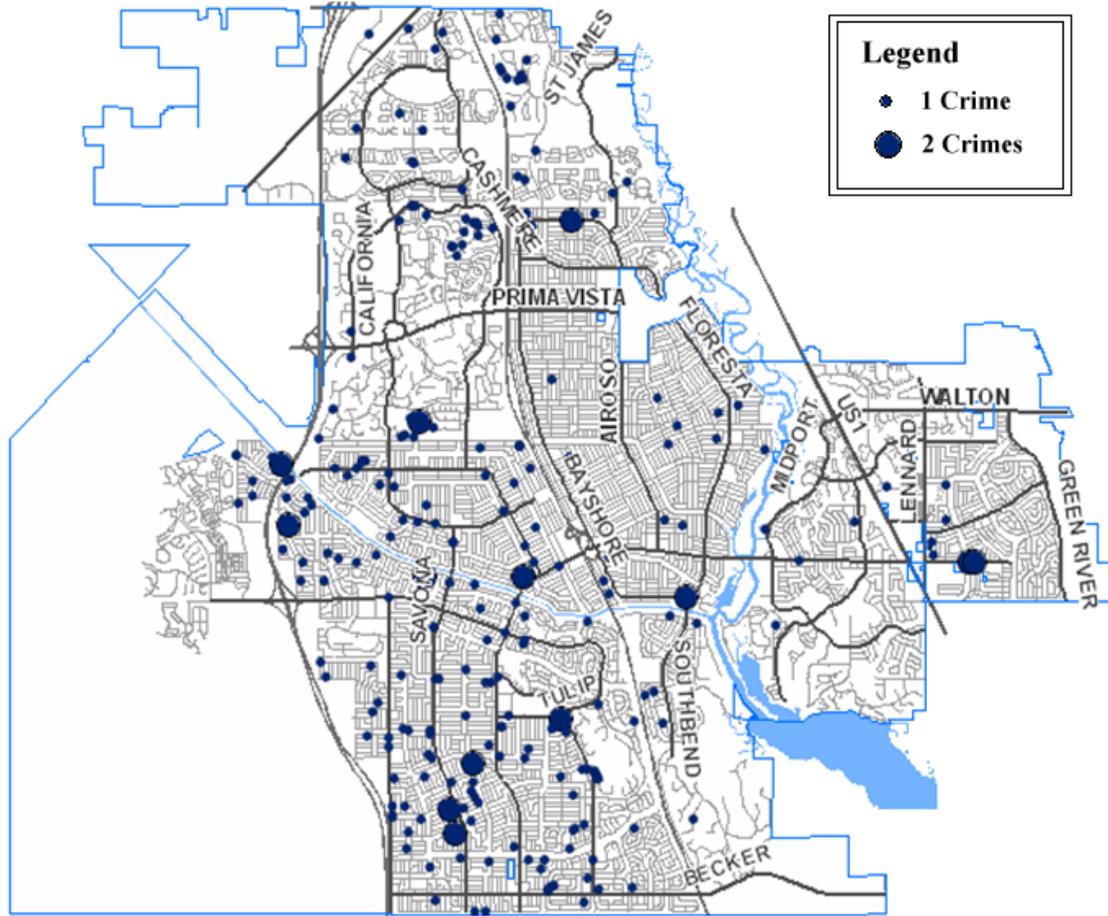
The analysis was conducted on data from 2004. There were 266 construction site burglary incidents in 2004. The following figure shows an increase in the second half of 2004. October was the highest month with 42 which may be due to the two hurricanes that occurred in September.

### Frequency by Month



Analysis for repeat victimization by address shows that of the 254 individual addresses that were victimized only 12 or 4.7% were victimized twice within one year. Spatial analysis showed that incidents were occurring predominantly on the west side of the city; incidentally this is where the majority of the construction was occurring.

## Reported Construction Site Burglary: Port St. Lucie, 2004



Because individual construction sites did not show to be repeatedly victimized, an analysis of repeat victimization by builder was conducted. The table below shows that 20% of the builders account for 69.2% of the crime. The top builder, Renar Homes, was victimized more than twice as much as any other builder.

## Frequency and Percentage of Builders' Victimizations

Builder	Number of Reported Incidents	Percent of Total	Cumulative Percent	Percent of Total Builders (N=70)	Cumulative Percent
Renar Homes	40	16.9%	16.9%	1.4%	1.4%
Adams Homes	15	6.3%	23.2%	1.4%	2.9%
Levitt And Sons	15	6.3%	29.5%	1.4%	4.3%
Ameritrend Homes	14	5.9%	35.4%	1.4%	5.7%
Hanover Homes	14	5.9%	41.4%	1.4%	7.1%
Mercedes Homes	11	4.6%	46.0%	1.4%	8.6%
Royal Professional Builders	10	4.2%	50.2%	1.4%	10.0%
Willard Brothers Construction	10	4.2%	54.4%	1.4%	11.4%
Maronda Home Builders	7	3.0%	57.4%	1.4%	12.9%
Princeton Homes	7	3.0%	60.3%	1.4%	14.3%
RJM Homes	6	2.5%	62.9%	1.4%	15.7%
Associated Homes Inc.	5	2.1%	65.0%	1.4%	17.1%
Groza Builders	5	2.1%	67.1%	1.4%	18.6%
Paramount Homes	5	2.1%	69.2%	1.4%	20.0%
All Others	73	30.8%	100.0%	80.0%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>100.0%</b>		<b>100.0%</b>	

From January to December 2004, five cases (1.9%) were cleared by arrest of either an adult (4 cases) or a juvenile (1 case). Seven cases (2.6%) were exceptionally cleared (adult).

The property taken listed in the reports was very specific, thus in order to do analysis they were grouped into general categories. The following table depicts a count of incidents by the type of property taken in the crimes. In most cases in which multiple pieces of property were taken, they fell into the same category (e.g., several appliances taken in one incident). The analysis shows that building supplies (19.5%) and appliances (16.9%) were most frequently stolen. However, if the categories pertaining to general construction supplies and equipment (e.g., building supplies, construction equipment, rebar, and ladders) are combined, they represent 33.8% of the property taken.

## Frequency and Percentage of Property Taken

Type of Property	Number of Reported Incidents	Percentage of Total
Building Supplies	52	19.5%
Appliances	45	16.9%
Internal cosmetic	24	9.0%
Construction equipment	24	9.0%
AC related	23	8.6%
Doors/Windows	20	7.5%
Pool related	11	4.1%
Rebar	8	3.0%
Ladder	6	2.3%
Hurricane Shutters	3	1.1%
Well pump	3	1.1%
Other	13	4.9%
Unknown/Not applicable*	34	12.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

\*Criminal damage incidents.

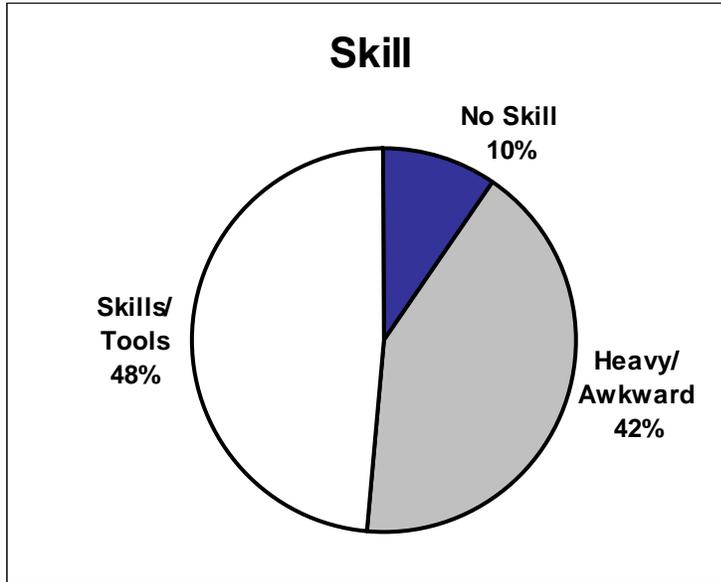
The difficulty of the crime was thought to be important in determining why property was being taken from the construction sites and would provide direction for responses. For example, if the crimes are fairly easy in that the property is unsecured, in plain site, and easy to move, responses may focus on target hardening or removing targets. All the reported crimes in 2004 were coded into three variables to measure the difficulty of the crime (see bullets). Because the actual skill and mode of transport is not known (i.e., lack of offender information), the reports were coded to minimum requirements. One person was responsible for all of the coding to ensure consistency.

- Skill: The level of skill it took to remove the property (0 = No skill, 1 = Heavy, awkward, forcibly removed, 2 = Skills and/or tools necessary)
- Transport: What minimum mode of transport was necessary to move the property (0 = Walk away, 1 = Car or small truck, 2 = Large truck)
- Access: Where was the property located on/in the construction site (0 = Outside, visible, unattached, 1 = Outside/attached, inside visible attached and/or unattached, 2 = Secured)

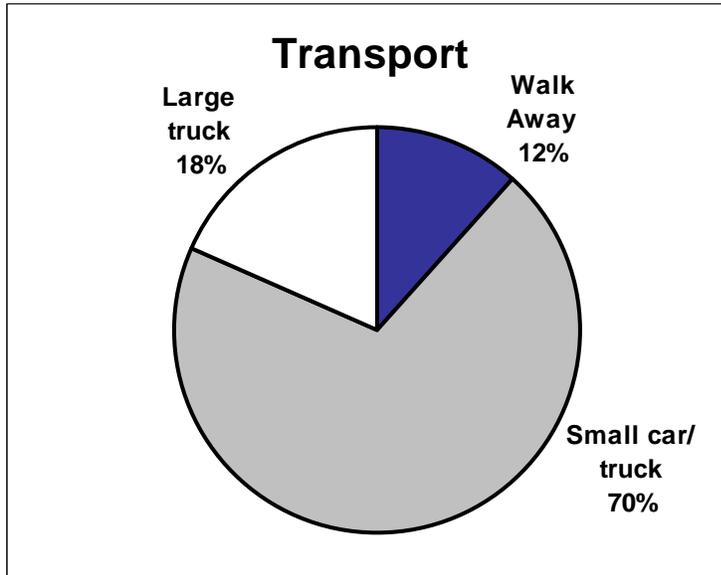
The analysis of the difficulty variables revealed that more crimes required the highest amount of skill, more required a car or small truck, and there was a fairly equal distribution of accessibility

of the property. The following are pie charts that represent the percentages for each of the variables.

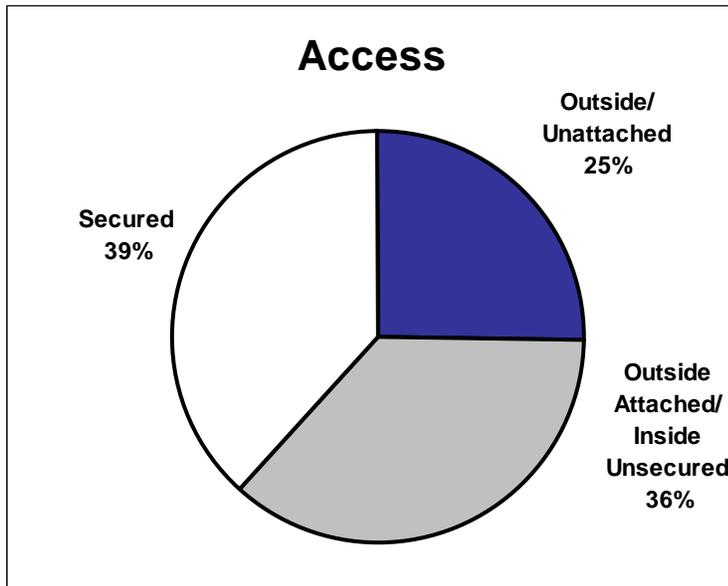
**Percentage—Skill: The level of skill it took to remove the property**



**Percentage—Transport: What minimum mode of transport was necessary to move the property**

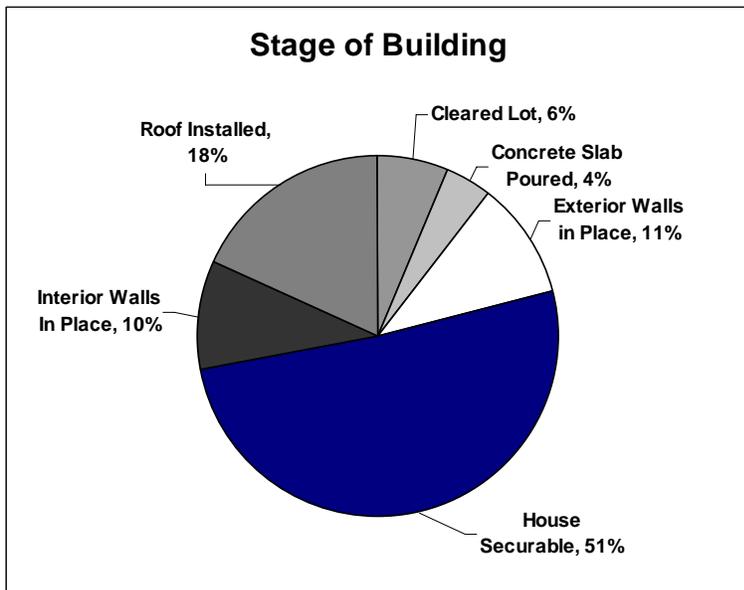


**Percentage—Access: Where was the property located on/in the construction site**



In the check sheet, officers were asked to indicate at what stage of building the crime occurred in order to determine when the homes were most vulnerable. The table below shows that just over half of the construction site burglary occurred when the house was securable which does not mean the house was actually secured.

**Frequency and Percentage of Stage of Building**



A meeting was held for builders to share their experiences and provide additional insight for this analysis. The themes from the focus group discussion include:

- Builders hire some subcontractors who provide their own materials.
- Builders don't typically report crimes of less than \$300 because it is not worth their time.
- There is tension between the builders and the PSL building department.
- Builders believe that subcontractors are the majority of the offenders.
- Builders believe that the homes are most vulnerable in the final stages of building.

A meeting with the city building department was conducted to gain additional insight into the problem. The key findings of the meeting include:

- 6,300 homes are currently under construction.
- Appliance installation is not required for closing by the builder, but may be required for bank inspection.
- On average, it takes about 10.5 months to build a house.
- Electricity meter inspection occurs when the house is securable and safe. Port St. Lucie is one of the few cities in the state to do it. It happens about three weeks before closing. The addresses that have requested or passed the inspection are faxed to Florida Power and Light every day.
- They think the offenders are predominantly insiders.
- There has been a change in building culture in recent years. Its normal practice to see workers on weekends, nights, and holidays.

## **Conclusions**

From the analysis, the following conclusions were made and shaped the nature of the responses:

- Large number of targets (over 6,000 homes under construction per day).
- No significant repeat victimization of addresses; only 12 repeat addresses out of 254.
- Crimes occur predominantly in the southwest section of the city. This is where most of the building is occurring.
- Twenty percent of builders victimized account for nearly 70% of the crimes.
- The arrest rate is very low.
- General construction supplies and equipment and appliances are primarily stolen.
- Over half of the crimes require the highest level of skill.
- Most of the property taken can be transported with a car or small truck.
- In only one fourth of the cases is the property easily accessible.
- In half of the incidents, the property was taken when the house was securable.

- Builders and the building department think the “insider hypothesis” is most prevalent.
- Electricity meter inspections are a “real time” indicator of when the house is securable (done around three weeks before home is finished).

## **Response**

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For this problem, a multifaceted response plan was undertaken that included a general and a targeted approach. The analysis revealed that the single-family construction site burglary problem in Port St. Lucie was focused in particular areas of the city, in later stages of building, and on particular types of property. We found that the nature of the responses necessary for this problem were techniques that the police alone could not implement. Therefore, as you will see, our responses centered on shifting and sharing the responsibility of implementation with builders. General responses were developed and implemented in the high risk areas that were identified through analysis. The responses included improvement of pattern identification and responses to patterns, educating potential victims and potential guardians through media, meetings, and training, and increasing police guardianship through construction site checks.

In addition, the analysis revealed that there were particular builders that were at higher risk of victimization than others. The PSLPD worked closely with several builders and responses were developed based on more specific analyses of individual builders’ victimizations. The following is a more detailed description of each of the responses implemented.

### ***Pattern Analysis***

As part of a larger project to improve crime analysis in the Port St. Lucie Police Department, pattern analysis was implemented through the hiring and training of experienced crime analysts and improvement of data collection. Specific to this problem solving project, the crime analysts began their pattern analysis by focusing on construction site crime. Once identified, the patterns were used to direct more traditional responses geared towards

apprehending offenders. The patterns allowed the detectives to prioritize their work and focus on repeat offending (multiple crimes in one pattern). For example, in March 2005, a pattern was identified of nine cement mixers stolen from construction sites. The incidents were mapped which showed that they were particularly close to the Interstate. Working with one of the previous victims, the detectives were able to borrow a cement mixer and attached a GPS locator to it and placed it at a site, clearly marked “No Trespassing,” in an area indicated at risk by the map of the nine incidents. After several days, the mixer was stolen and three men were arrested for theft and criminal trespass on a construction site.

### ***Media Campaign***

For several months in the summer and fall of 2005, members of the police department and problem solving team worked with various media to provide information about the crime, responses being implemented, and general crime prevention advice. The campaign included five television news spots, three radio interviews, and ten newspaper articles. The following is an example of two articles:

THURSDAY  
SEPTEMBER 1, 2005

An edition of  
Treasure Coast  
News/Press-tribune  
25 CENTS



## Insiders top suspects in construction site thefts, report says

By Will Greenlee  
staff writer

PORT ST. LUCIE — Insiders, including builders and subcontractors, are widely suspected of being responsible for local construction site burglary and theft-related incidents, but the number of crimes is relatively small, a recently-obtained report claims.

The report, written by Rachel Boba, an assistant professor at Florida Atlantic University, made a variety of suggestions to combat the issue, such as focusing on repeat victims and pattern identification.

"There's so many construction sites in various stages of construction, to try to monitor all of them would be very, very difficult," Assistant Police Chief Brian Reuther said Wednesday. "That's why it requires the contractors and the subs and everyone to get on board and try to eliminate this problem."

There were 266 construction site burglary and theft-related activities last year, or an average of 22 per month. This appears to be a small number considering more than 6,000 homes are being built at any time.

The crimes seem to occur in the middle of a block in isolated areas with few neighbors. The majority happen in the city's western and southwestern sections — where most of the building is occurring.

Of those analyzed in the report, 20 percent of builders victimized account for almost 70 percent of the crimes.

Most of the crimes committed aren't in gated communities and require a great level of skill, while the analysis and the experience of builders, the building department and officers suggest insiders are responsible.

"These crimes tend to take an elevated level of skill, the property is not easily accessible and they occur when the house is securable," the report states. "The types of property taken are those types that insiders might easily use in their work or have specific knowledge about the installation timing and skills needed to remove the property."

The report, which included a lengthy section on institutionalization of problem analysis at the department to better fight crime, suggested contrasting the top five victimized builders with those that have few burglaries and many sites.

Boba said police met recently with several builders, including Renar Homes, which had the largest number of reported incidents last year. She said Renar has changed some of its practices, and reduced crimes.

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- Post a comment on [TCPalm.com](http://TCPalm.com)

# PSL tackles building burglaries

By Will Greenlee  
staff writer

PORT ST. LUCIE — When two stucco workers left the construction site about 6 p.m., they removed a tire from the concrete mixer and the piece that connects the mixer to a vehicle, hoping to make it more difficult to steal.

When they returned about six hours later, the \$2,800 mixer was gone.

"We think we had five trailers and four mixers (stolen) this year," Scot Murphy, president of Scot Murphy Plastering, said in a recent

interview. "We've had two mixers so far this year."

Just as Port St. Lucie's population has soared in recent years — almost 125,000 as of January compared to about 84,000 five years ago — new home construction also has boomed.

The upswing in building means more opportunities for thieves to take construction equipment like Murphy's concrete mixer, building supplies, such as cinder blocks and plywood, and home appliances, including pricey refrigerators and dishwashers.

"The more population that

comes in, the more houses that are being built, the more targets, the more opportunities, the more crime," said Sgt. Roberto Santos of the Port St. Lucie police.

Rachel Boba, an assistant professor at Florida Atlantic University working with police on a broad study that includes an analysis of reported construction site burglary- and theft-related activities, said that last year there were 266 such incidents, or an average of 22 per month.

"We have over 6,000 homes

See **BURGLARIES**, B3



JUAN DALE BROWN staff photograph

From left, Robert Conwell, Juan Pocosco and Eu Maldu of Scot Murphy Plastering work on a home under construction in Port St. Lucie. Two plaster mixers have been stolen from the company's Port St. Lucie work sites this year.

## BURGLARIES

FROM B1

being constructed at any given time," Santos said. "Out of 6,000 potential targets, 22 a month, so that's the issue."

That issue can be tough to combat.

In many cases, construction sites are unsecured when workers knock off for the day, leaving stacks of building materials and heavy equipment literally out in the open. Vacant or wooded lots surround some sites, and the crimes occur at night or in the early morning, so the chances a burglary will be seen by a neighbor are slim.

"If you come up and rob me, I can describe you, I know what you look like," Boba said. "If it's a construction site, nobody lives there, nobody's there, it's left alone for on average 16 hours ..."

Meanwhile, Murphy, whose business performs stucco work from Hobe Sound to Sebastian, said only in Port St. Lucie has he had property stolen.

Murphy said investigators advised him to remove concrete mixers and trailers from job sites at day's end, but he said that's "economically impossible."

"You'd have to be able to pick them up at 5:30 every night and have them sitting back on the job by 6:30 in the morning," he said. "I've got 10 crews. There's no way I could do that."

Boba, a former crime analyst with police in Tempe, Ariz., suspects those responsible either are "insiders," thieves driving around the city searching for unsecured sites, or that fraud might be involved.

"Who else could be committing these burglaries?" she said.

The top items stolen in 2004 include building supplies, such as studs, copper wiring and steel, and appliances.

Of the 254 addresses hit last year, only 12 were victimized twice. The majority of the incidents happened in the western and southwestern portions of the city.

Police in March employed some unusual tactics to nab three Lake Worth men who allegedly stole a concrete mixer. They used surveillance equipment with GPS technology to monitor a mixer at a construction site near Gatlin and Rosser boulevards.

The men allegedly entered the site and attached the mixer to the rear of their Ford pickup truck before being stopped on Interstate 95 in Martin County.

Asked whether construction site burglaries/thefts are a big problem, Don Santos, past president of the Treasure Coast Builders Association, said, "Big problem might not be the right adjective. I think the better adjective is a continuing problem."

He said the Port St. Lucie

police and the St. Lucie County Sheriff's Office have ongoing, educational programs to discuss the issue.

"But to get it translated down from the owner of a company to the superintendents to the workers is literally a monumental task, especially with so much activity going on," he said.

Murphy, whose payroll is \$1,500 per hour, described construction site burglaries/thefts as the "cost of doing business."

"I know everybody's just frustrated and aggravated," he said. "We're all making money, we're all busy as can be ... We're getting hit more but we got a lot more cash flow to be able to cover this stuff."

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## Meetings with Builders

Throughout 2005 and continuing, members of the crime prevention team have attended monthly meetings of individual builders/contractors as well as the Treasure Coast Builders Association. Personnel have provided general crime prevention advice, results of the initial problem analysis, as well as current ongoing patterns. The relationships forged through these meetings have made communication with specific builders easier and have made the builders more responsive to the police (see below).

## ***Crime Prevention Checks***

Data collection revealed that electric meter inspections take place in the final stages of construction and addresses are faxed to the electric company when they pass. Since the analysis showed that a large number of construction site burglaries occur in the final stages of building, these meter checks provide a real time notification of an increase in a construction site's risk. The crime prevention team obtained the addresses of the meter checks on a weekly basis from the building department, entered them into a database, and produced a report that was distributed to patrol officers. Addresses located in the riskiest areas (i.e., in the southwest part of the city, as determined by the analysis), were prioritized, and patrol officers, especially those on midnight shift, conducted daily checks of the sites. If the sites were found to be unlocked or property left unsecured, "crime opportunity forms" were left for the builders to warn them about the vulnerability of the site. Also, from the analysis, we found that builders require supervisors to check individual sites each day, so the forms were effective in reaching the intended audience. Feedback from builders' supervisors in regular meetings indicates they were receiving the forms and making necessary changes to the site to reduce theft.

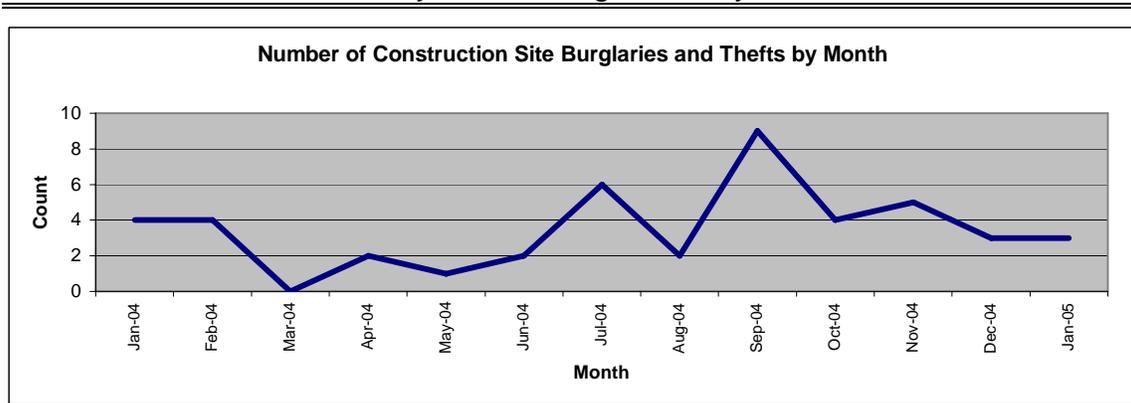
## ***Working with Specific Builders***

The analysis showed that 20% of the builders victimized accounted for nearly 70% of the reported crime. Through our analysis, we also found that many of the crimes occurred because of poor place management practices by the builders, such as lack of guardianship, long delivery and installation windows, and carelessness in protecting property. Thus, we decided that a targeted response with the top builders focused on increased guardianship through site management, tightening of delivery practices, and target hardening, was warranted.

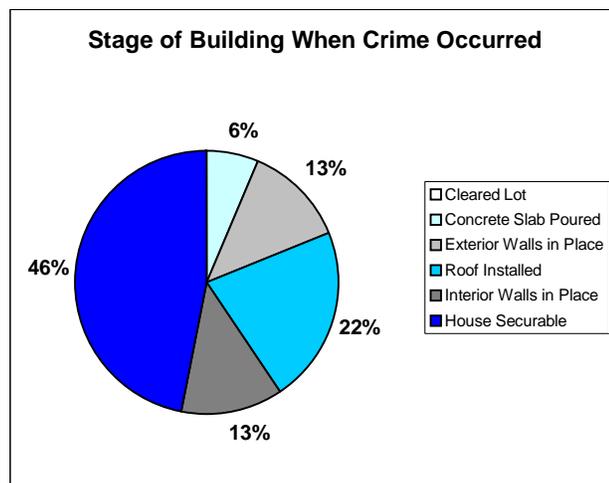
The first step of this targeted response was to conduct further analysis of the selected builders' crimes. We began by working with Renar Homes the builder with the most crimes in 2004. We met with this builder in February of 2005 and presented them the following analysis:

## Renar Homes

### Construction Site Burglary and Theft in Port St. Lucie January 2004 through January 2005



Types of Property Taken		
	Count	Percent
Building Supplies	13	28.89%
Doors/Windows	11	24.44%
AC related	5	11.11%
Internal cosmetic	5	11.11%
Appliances	3	6.67%
Ladder	2	4.44%
Hurricane Shutters	0	0.00%
Construction equipment	0	0.00%
Pool related	0	0.00%
Rebar	0	0.00%
Well Pump	0	0.00%
Other	2	4.44%
Unknown/Not applicable	4	8.89%
<b>Total</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100.00%</b>



In addition, analysis of the difficulty variables indicated that Renar's crimes were significantly "easier" than other builders' crimes. That is, property was being left on the sites unsecured. It arose in the meeting that builder's supervisors were managing from 25 to 30 homes

each. After discussion of the analysis results, Renar agreed to implement the following responses:

- Reduce the numbers of homes assigned to site supervisor from 25-30 to 15 for better oversight
- Focus on property left on site
- Delayed installation of appliances

It took a month for Renar to begin implementing these changes, but from March of 2005 to June 2005, they saw a significant decrease in crimes (see assessment below). In light of this preliminary success, we planned a larger meeting with several more of the top builders on the list. Similar information was presented to builders in August of 2005. However, we thought it important to invite both builders who were the most victimized along with a select few that had little to no crime. We believed that many of the crimes were due to opportunities related to builders' practices and those builders with few crimes would show that improved building practices were possible. For example, the following practices were discussed in the meeting:

- One company has a waiver for banks to sign for responsibility for appliances if they insist on installation too early.
- One company requires homeowners to take out builder risk insurance.
- One company only works with certain subcontractors.
- One company delivers appliances the day before closing.
- In its planned communities, one company takes back the master key after the appliances have been installed and only the supervisor has the key. Subsequent subcontractors have to contact that person for entry.

The builders who attended were very cooperative which we feel was because many of them attended the initial analysis meeting and had been at the association meetings where crime prevention personnel attended. Although many of the builders agreed to review suggestions and potentially implement changes, three of the top problem builders made firm commitments to change their building practices. They also agreed, in the future, to receive updated analysis from the police department and adjust their practices accordingly. In addition to general target

hardening and improving delivery practices, each of these three builders agreed to implement the following:

1. Adams Homes
  - Appliances were the top theft concern
  - Reduced the time the appliances were installed before closing
  - Assign a person to check that homes were secured on a daily basis
2. Hanover
  - Pool equipment stolen more often
  - Installed video surveillance cameras at particular construction sites
  - Removed the pool equipment and re-installed just before the closing
3. Royal Professional Builders
  - Air conditioning units were stolen more often
  - Delayed installation of air conditioning units
  - Implemented stickers in Spanish and English affixed to air conditioning units (see below) to increase the perception of risk of being caught.

#### **Air Conditioning Sticker**



## Assessment

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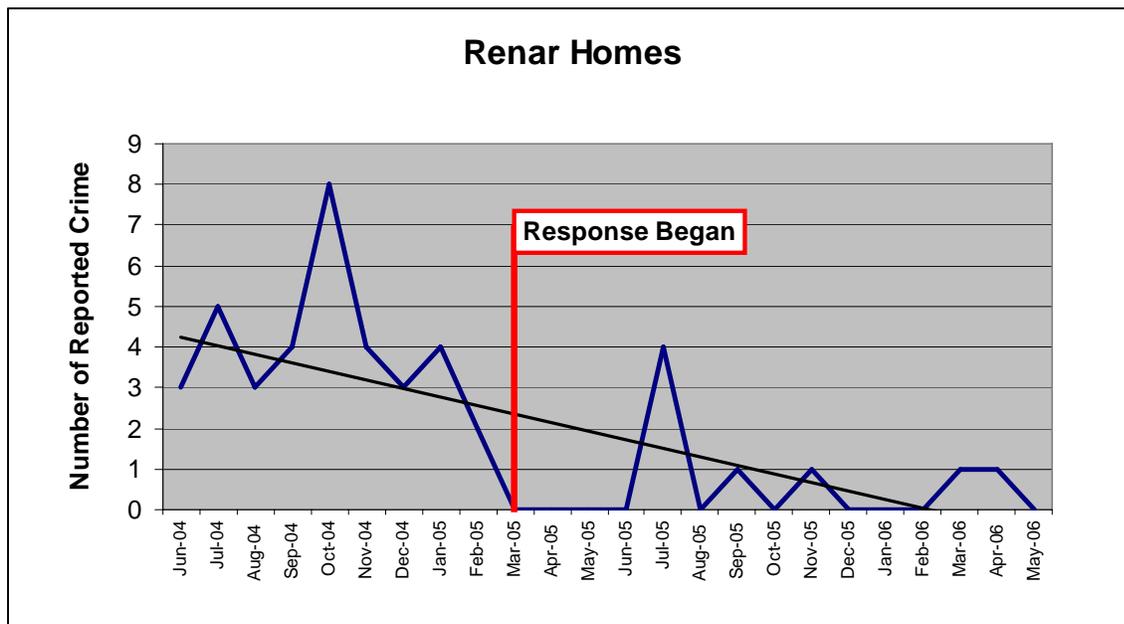
Because there were two approaches to the response to this problem, the assessment will present results separately for the impact to the particular builders and the overall impact.

### ***Assessment of Targeted Builder Response***

The results of the assessment for the individual builder responses indicate that each of the builders were victimized less than they were before the responses were implemented. The following charts show the monthly counts of crime for the previous two years and indicate when each builder began implementing responses. A linear trendline has been added to each chart to show the general decrease of crime in each case.

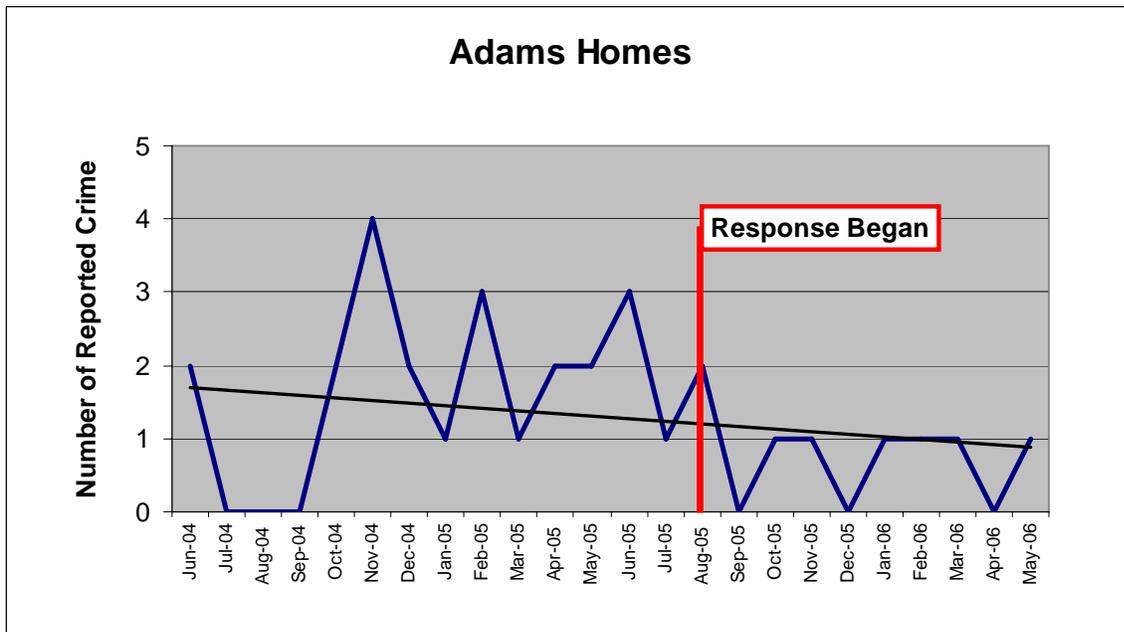
#### *Renar Homes*

Of the four builders that participated in the specific responses, the most dramatic effect was seen for Renar Homes. Note that the spike of four crimes in July 2005 was the result of one offender hitting four houses over one weekend.



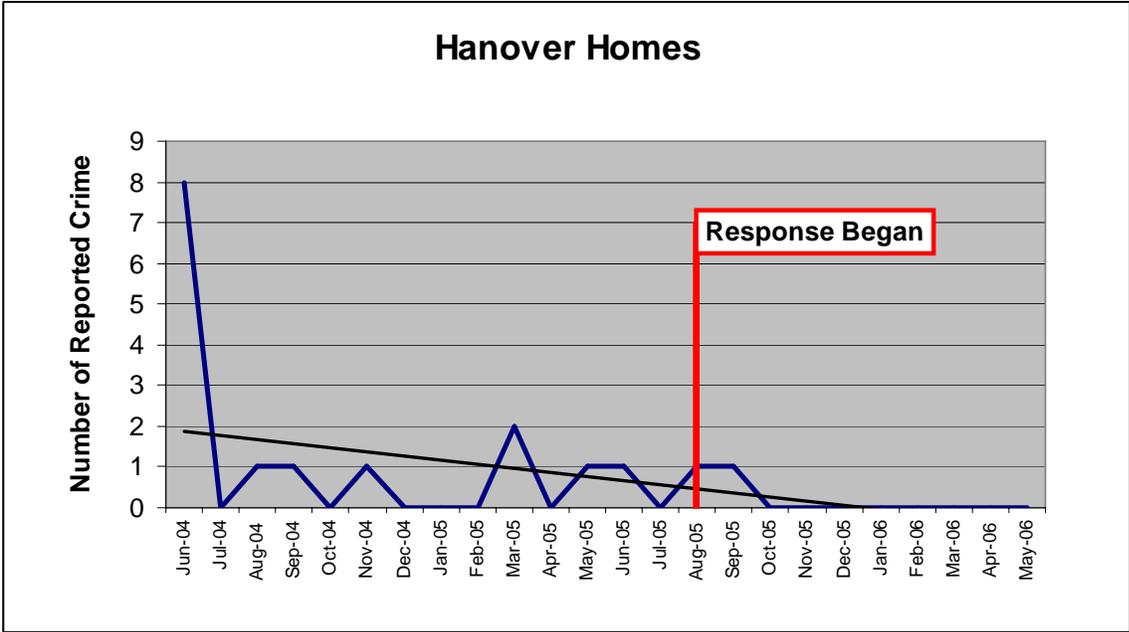
### Adams Homes

Adams Homes has had only a handful of crimes since they began implementing responses. They are continuing to improve their practices based on information and patterns provided by the department.



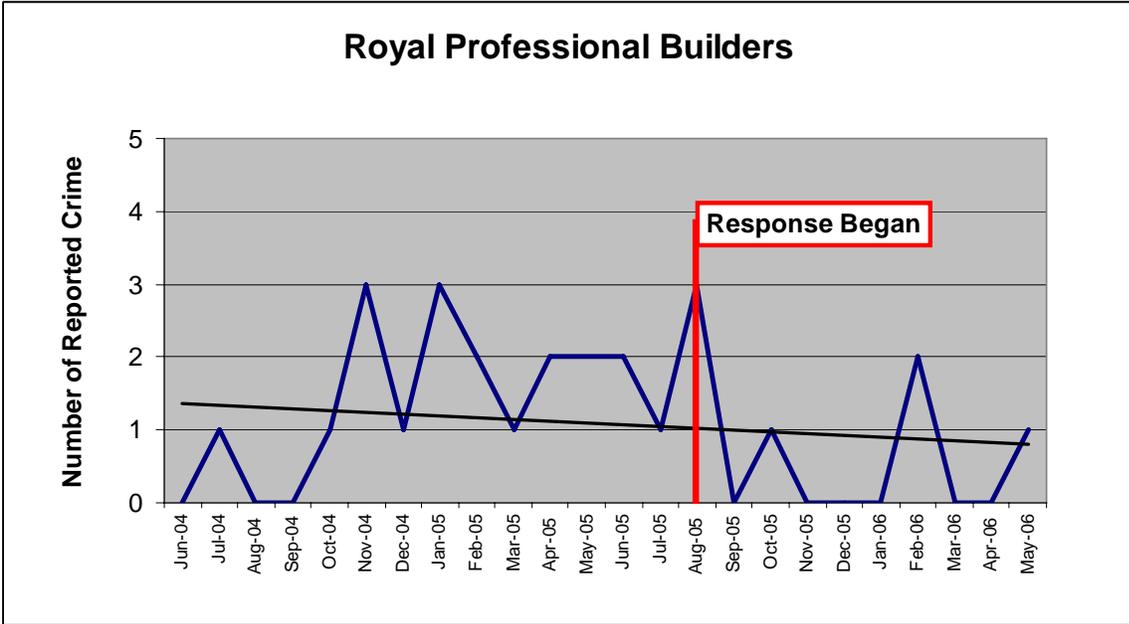
### Hanover Homes

Although Hanover Homes has not suffered as many crimes as the other builders, since September 2005 they have had no reported crimes. Feedback from the builder reveals that they have changed practices of overseeing and delivering building materials as well as the installation of pool equipment.



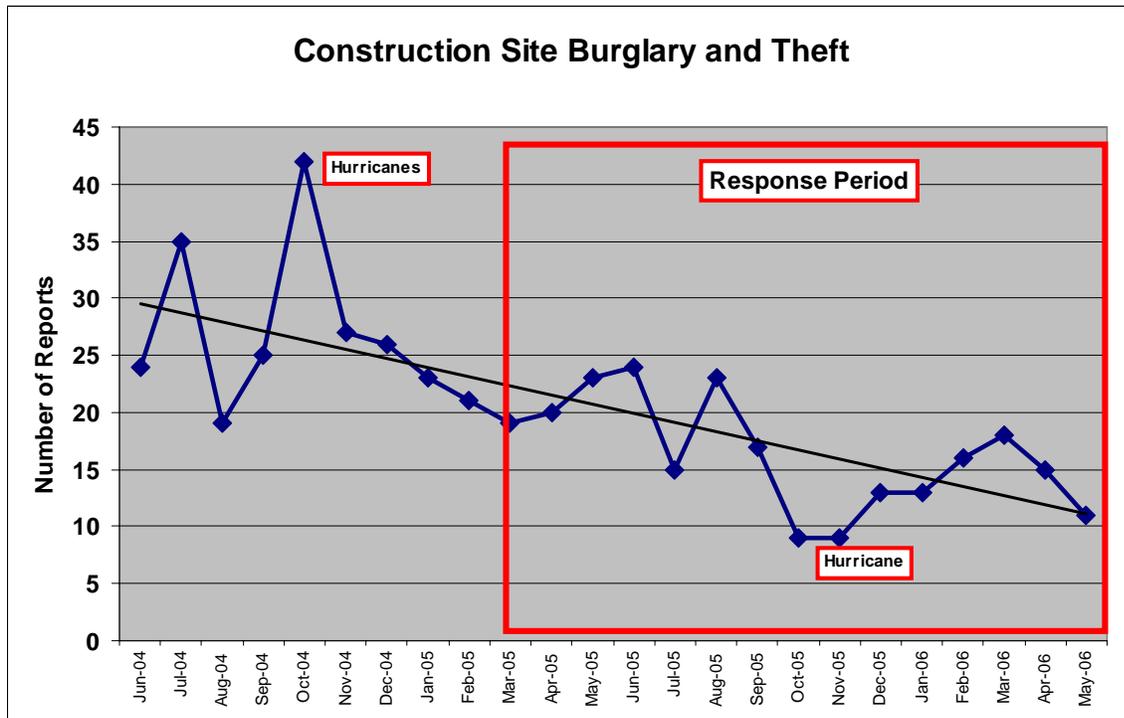
*Royal Professional Builders*

RPB has placed the sticker on all of their air conditioning units when they are installed and we see from the chart they are also reporting less crime.



## Assessment of General Response

The figure below shows the monthly count of crime for the last two years and indicates the response period of this project. The linear trend line indicates the downward trend of construction site burglary even with building levels slightly higher (6,621 in 2004 to 6,829 in 2005).



Notably, in September 2004, Port St. Lucie was hit directly by two hurricanes, Frances and Jeanne, to which we attribute the large increase of crime in October 2004. Analysis shows that most of these thefts were building materials, specifically plywood. They were reported in October because of the delay in building caused by the hurricanes. Unfortunately, Port St. Lucie was hit with another hurricane in October 2005 (Wilma). Based on our previous analysis, we informed the builders to target harden and remove materials before the hurricane. The analysis shows a dramatic decrease in reported crime from October 2004 to October 2005. Conversations with builders after the hurricane indicate the fewer crimes were a result of builders locking down

their sites before the hurricane and taking better care of their property, particularly building materials.

Finally, since the analysis and response, we have continued partnerships with CEOs, buildings supervisors, and the city's building department. Recently, we were asked to do a formal presentation at the Treasure Coast Builders association on the evaluation results and direction for continued responses.

## **Conclusion**

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We selected this problem because we thought it would be a true test of the problem-oriented policing philosophy since it was a citywide problem that affected the entire building industry in Port St. Lucie. Our approach to this expansive problem was centered on in-depth, thorough analysis that allowed us to focus and tailor our responses to the most risky areas and victims and to convince the place managers to participate. Based on our assessment, we have been successful in impacting this problem as well as in forging partnerships with builders. Port St. Lucie was the fastest growing city in the U.S. in 2004 and the third fastest in 2005. This type of growth is projected to almost double our size to 265,000 in twenty years. Our goal is to use our current partnerships with builders and continued analysis to sustain effective responses to this problem.

## **Agency and Officer Information**

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The Port St. Lucie Police Department emphasizes the importance of problem solving and adopted the problem-oriented policing philosophy approximately fifteen years ago. All personnel in the Port St. Lucie Police Department received training in problem analysis in November and December of 2004. They have been previously trained in problem solving and the SARA model.

This problem solving project was undertaken by a team of personnel including officers, detectives, detective sergeants, patrol sergeants, crime analysts, and a researcher. The executive staff was integral in deciding which problem to address, approving additional data collection forms, as well as selection and implementation of responses. No additional incentives were given to participate in this project. The general resources committed to the project were personnel time which did not go beyond the existing budget.

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