

OPERATION CRACKER

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"Operation Cracker"

Summary

The aim of "Operation Cracker" was to reduce crime figures, even though they were not out of control to begin with. It also intended to create an environment which would be attractive to the genuine customer but hostile to the potential criminal. These objectives were met by pulling several resources together. Crime (shoplifting and vehicle crime) was reduced by 53 per cent, public disorder offences and anti-social behaviour were completely eliminated.

The outcome of "Operation Cracker" made shopping centre staff, security guards and the public realise the benefits of challenging crime and of co-operating. Success breeds success and as such the shopping centre and sub-let stores management are willing to keep the momentum going in the right direction. In all, force and Home Office directives have been addressed making the community feel safer, involved and reassured,

"Operation Cradcer"

The Concourse Shopping Centre (CSC) is a self-contained shopping centre (see photographs available in Appendix) situated in the centre of Skelmersdale, Lancashire. Skelmersdale is a new town consisting of mainly mass-produced, low-cost housing estates, built a number of years ago to accommodate a shortage of housing in the Merseyside area. It is in close proximity to the Merseyside and Greater Manchester areas just off the M 58 motorway.

The CSC was expanded and built as it stands today in 1989-90. It contains a number of units mainly sub-let to high street stores. The building is owned by a private investment company which also employs the management and a number of security guards.

An increase in thefts from shops and stalls and vehicle related crime was observed during December (see relevant tables in Appendix). Incidents of anti-social behaviour, particularly having to do with juvenile nuisance, have also taken place.

The problem was identified in a meeting with the shopping centre management and security guards where they explained what, in their opinion, the problem was and what should be done about it. Previous experience and crime figures suggest that the CSC faces a problem on the run up to Christmas (see relevant tables in Appendix).

Our belief was, that in co-operation with store and shop management crime figures could be reduced and a better service could be provided. They could play a significant role in suggesting improvements in crime prevention and detection,

The intended response was:

- to highlight to the shopping centre management and sub-let stores the particular problems causing crime and how they could assist in reducing them. The subsequent reduction in crime would have a primary positive effect to shoppers and employees and a secondary one to potential investors,
- to inform them that the police would provide advice and uniformed support in deterring and arresting offenders
- to request information, from store and shop management, which would assist the police in combating crime and anti social behaviour

This problem was given priority over others because of the obvious increase in crime during December, particularly thefts from shops and stalls (see relevant tables in Appendix). It should be noted that the town of Skelmersdale has a high percentage of drug users who commit crimes to satisfy their habit. December, being a month of increased shopping, facilitates their criminal activities.

Analysis of the crime figures and discussions of the issue with the appropriate patrol officers contributed significantly to the formation of our action. CSC shoppers were also asked about their views on how the police could facilitate and improve their visits at the centre as far as crime and safety were concerned. Crime figures analysis identified **WHEN** and **WHERE** these crimes were occurring. It turned out that 71 per cent of thefts from shops and stalls during the previous year had occurred on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays from 1pm until 4pm (see relevant tables in Appendix). Thus, our aim was to notify the shopping centre and its stores of this and to co-operate in order to prevent it. Our combined resources were concentrated on these specific days and hours and a high profile approach was adopted in order to deter offenders from committing a crime in the first place.

During the meetings, the CSC shopkeepers were informed that criminals target shops based on reasons such as aisle layout and particular items. Not employing a security guard or having staff members situated in places with limited view increased the possibility of thefts. Other recommendations to them included:

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their participation in the shop watch/radio link scheme where information of suspicious activity could be immediately relayed to another store, to security guards and to the police, if needed. This can act as a crime deterrent as potential offenders would realise that they are being watched from every angle

0 the CSC's CCTV equipment should be used to its full potential and operated at all times. The operator should be in constant radio contact with security guards and shop staff informing them of any suspicious activity.

0 obtaining banning orders on shoplifters and individuals with anti-social behaviour

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their staff and security guards becoming familiar with the photos of prolific offenders to ensure that they are identified as soon as possible and thus minimising the chances of offences occurring. The use of a photo album was allowed by the force solicitor, under conditions which ensure that data protection and human rights issues are not contravened.

0 Encouraging car park attendants to wear high visibility jackets and informing them on the most targeted vehicles by criminals. A little memo was made to inform them on indications of vehicles possibly involved or having been subjected to criminal activity.

0 Encouraging car park attendants to report any suspicious activity by means of a personal radio to the CSC security guards.

Officers from as many units as possible were encouraged to patrol the shopping centre and the car parks when possible. Moreover, little flyers (see Appendix) were made and placed in every officer's tray highlighting the peak time of offences. The idea was also to let officers know that everybody was taking part and it wouldn't be the usual few. And if all of the relevant times a uniformed presence was achieved, crime would be prevented.

Success of the "operation" would instil a lot more confidence in the shopping centre thus reducing the demands placed on the police in the long term. This would turn the feeling of intimidation around from the shopkeepers to the criminals as CSC's management and its shops would be actively protecting their own interests.

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Our action resulted in a 53 per cent reduction (see relevant tables in Appendix) in crime and total disappearance of anti-social behaviour. Store and shop management and security guards became more confident in the police's ability to tackle crime. This successful crime prevention approach has also resulted in other stores becoming willing to participate in initiative to deter crimes.

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Appendix

"Operation Cracker"

PC Jason Robinson

This report examines stealing from shops and stalls on the concourse in Skelmer ,:dale. The reason for the report is to establish the most effective times for patrolling (4i the Concourse to reduce this crime and to make the shoppers feel safer over the weeks leading up to Christmas. Therefore the current (111199 to 30/10/99) stealing from shops and stalls trend will be established with regards to times and days of week when additional cover is required. The 3 weeks prior to Christmas 1998 will also be examined noting volume days and times of stealing from shops and stalls.

Jan `99 to Oct `99

VOLUME TIMES

DAY	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	20
SUN	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
MON	0	0	2	1	1	3	3	1	0	0
TUE	0	1	1	1	1	2	4	2	1	0
WED	2	0	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	0
THU	1	1	2	1	4	0	1	2	0	0
FRI	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
SAT	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	0	2	1
Grand Total	4	2	8	6	10	8	13	8	4	1

66% of stealing from shops and stalls occurs between 1pm and 6pm from January to October 1999. 48% of this type of offence occurred between 1pm and 4pm.

VOLUME DAYS

DAY	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	20
SUN	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
MON	0	0	2	1	1	3	3	1	0	0
TUE	0	1	1	1	1	2	4	2	1	0
WED	2	0	2	2	2	1	1	2	1	0
THU	1	1	2	1	4	0	1	2	0	0
FRI	1	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
SAT	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	0	2	1
Grand Total	4	2	8	6	10	8	13	8	4	1

59% of stealing from shops and stalls occurs between Tuesday and Thursday from January to October 1999.

1 - 24 December '98

VOLUME TIMES

DAY	10	11	12	13	14	15	18	19	20
SUN	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
TUE	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
WED	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
THU	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
FRI	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0
Grand Total	3	3	1	2	1	2	1	3	1

64% of stealing from shops and stalls occurred between 10am - 12 midday and 1pm - 4pm during December 1998.

VOLUME DAYS

DAY	10	11	12	13	14	15	18	19	20
SUN	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0~
TUE	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
WED	0	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0
THU	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	1
FRI	0	1	0	0		1	0	1	0
Grand Total	3	3	1	2	1	2	1	3	1

71% of stealing from shops and stalls occurred Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday during December 1998.

SUMMARY

Best value patrolling will be achieved by focusing on Tuesdays to Thursdays particularly between 1pm and 4pm. Any additional resources would be used to work 10am till midday or to extend the shift from 1pm till 6pm.

Attention could also be focused on Thursday and Friday nights in December when there will be late trading as well as Sunday trading from 11am till 4pm.

SAFE SHOPPING AND REDUCED CRIME

		9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
06/12/99	MON											*	*
07/12/99	TUE											*	
08/12/99	WED												"
09/12/99	THU						-						
10/12/99	FRI												
11/12/99	SAT											*	
12/12/99	SUN	*	*							*		*	
13/12/99	MON											*	*
14/12/99	TUE											*	*
15/12/99	D											*	
16/12/99	U												
17/12/99	I												
18/12/99	WED											*	*
19/12/99	THU	*	*							*	*	*	*
20/12/99	FRI												
21/12/99	SAT												
22/12/99	SUN												
23/12/99	MON											*	
24/12/99	TUE												*

Core patrolling times with potentially highest volume offences

Additional patrol times

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Concourse not open

There were 107 offences on The Concourse between the 111199 and 27110199, which is of Skelmersdales crime over this period.

HOTSPOTS FOR OFFENCES ON THE CONCOURSE

PLACE OF OFFENCE	Total
SUPERDRUG	14
CARPARK	12
ALDI	6
BOOTS	6
MOTORWORLD	6
KWIK SAVE	5
SCOOPS	5
SUPERCIGS	5
PEACOCKS	4
WHAT EVERYONE WANTS	3
BOOZE BUSTERS	2
FARMFOODS	2
HOME BARGAINS	2
MCDONALDS	2
NEW LOOK	2
PARTNERS	2

THE TOP VOLUME OFFENCES ON THE CONCOURSE

OFFENCE	Total
Stealing from shops and stalls	64
Stealing Motor Vehicles OR UTMV	8
Cheque and Credit Card Fraud	5
Other Theft or Unauthorised Taking	5
Burglary Other than in a Dwelling	4
Criminal Damage To Vehicles	4
Theft from Vehicle	3
Common Assault	2
Theft by an Employee	2