

# Making Convenience Stores Safe in Houston

*Changing the societal problem of violent crime in convenience stores with a Problem Oriented Policing approach by the Houston Police Department*



Houston Police Department

Sergeant Mike Hill  
Officer Ryan Watson

Does this look familiar in *your* city?



Robberies gone bad often end here...



# “Not So Friendly” Neighborhood Corner Stores



# 2007 was a BAD year in Houston

Murder	10
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Rape	8
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Robbery	1138
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Aggravated Assault	414
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Burglary	475
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Crime statistics for calendar year 2007 for convenience store premises

S.A.R.A.

# Scanning

Identify the recurring problems

What are the consequences

Developing broad goals

# Convenience Store Task Force



Houston Police Department



Major Petroleum Corporations



Corporate Loss Prevention Experts



Greater Houston Retailers' Association  
(GHRA)



Community Stake Holders

# What is a Convenience Store?

**“Convenience Store** means any business that is primarily engaged in the retail sale of convenience goods, or both convenience goods and gasoline, and has less than 10,000 square feet of retail floor space. Convenience store does not include any business where there is no retail floor space accessible to the public.”

# How was the crime distributed?

- Estimated (in 2007) 1,000 Convenience Stores inside Houston city limits.
- With 1138 Robberies, the odds were that each location would be robbed at least once per year.
- The statistics showed otherwise, some locations showed multiple robberies, but most locations showed none at all.
- 
- The robbery rates between corporate chain stores and individually owned locations differed greatly.

S.A.R.A.

# Analysis

Identifying conditions associated with the problem

Collect relevant data

Research the problem type

Narrow the scope

Identify resources available

Develop a working hypothesis

# The Iron Law of Troublesome Places\*

Frequency of  
troublesome events



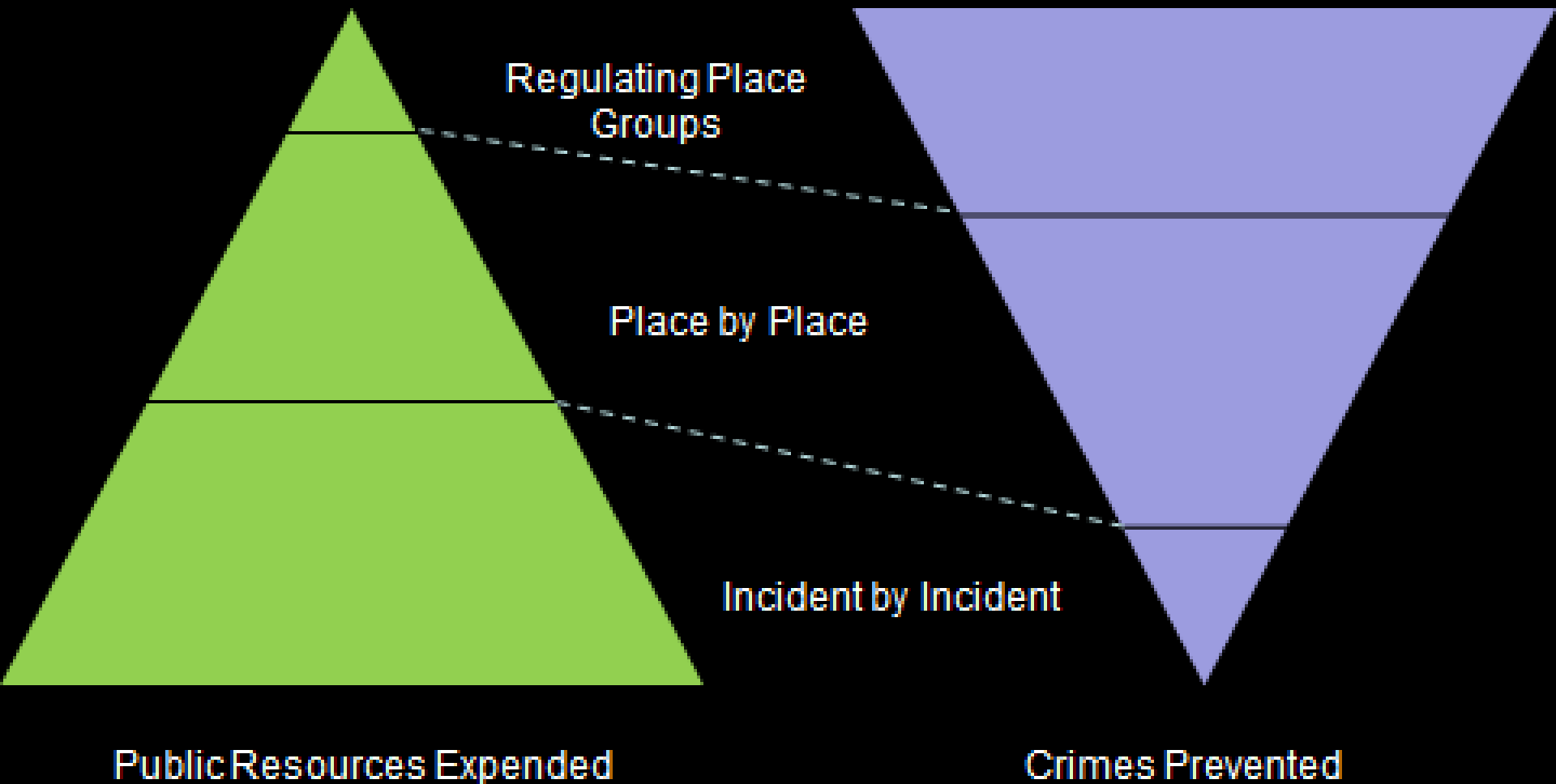
## Facilities known to follow this law\*\*

- Apartment complexes
- Banks
- Bars, pubs, and clubs
- Bus stop shelters
- Businesses (various)
- Coffee shops
- Construction sites
- Convenience stores
- Fast food restaurants
- Gas stations
- Health care facilities
- Hotels and motels
- Parking lots
- Places of worship
- Schools
- Sports facilities
- Telephone booths
- Young offender facilities

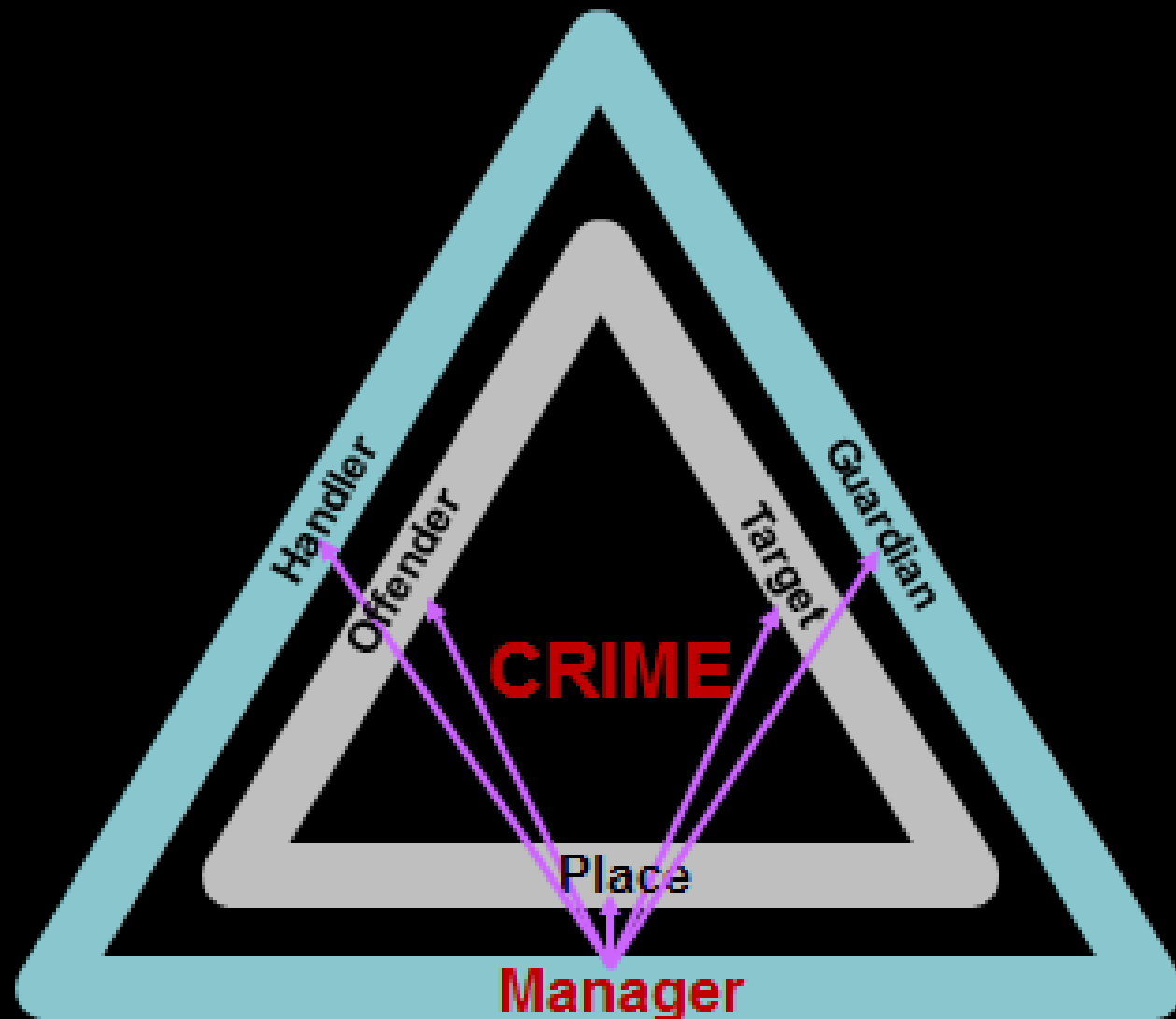
\* Figure from Wilcox and Eck 2011. The Criminology of the Unpopular. *Criminology and Public Policy*

\*\* All from Eck, Clarke and Guerette, 2008, except coffee shops and places of worship (Duro, 2010).

# Ways of Addressing Problem Places



# Place Managers Control Other Sides of Triangles



# Best Practices

- Large corporate chains had identified best practices in loss prevention and robbery prevention which had been developed based on research and experience.
- Things like cameras, sign placement, employee training, cash handling policies and drop safes contributed to low robbery rates at corporate stores.



# “Money makes the world go ‘round”

- Owners cited financial concerns as a reason for not implementing best practices in their stores.
- Small businesses do not have the financial capital to hire loss prevention experts to develop “best practices”.
- Any expenses at “mom and pop” stores directly affected the personal income of the business owner.
- Owners believed incorrectly that the cost of the infrastructure would be greater than the few hundred dollars that might be lost in a robbery.

# Culture and Language

- Houston is an international city, where roughly 30% of the population in Houston was not born in the U.S.
- Nearly every major language is represented in Houston, sometimes making communication with the police difficult.
- Retail loss prevention culture in other countries is largely undeveloped in comparison with vast growth of the field that has taken place in the last few decades.
- Most small business owners were unaware that they had access to loss prevention resources that the Houston Police Department and other entities provided.

# Offenders

- Males in their early 20's
- Motivated by quick scores of large amounts of money
- Offenders considered locations to have a low risk of being caught – poor quality or complete lack of cameras
- Responded to resistance (usually small business owners) with extreme violence
- Offenders understood police were largely reactionary and if they could escape, they likely would never be caught.

- **Richard Cobb**- robbed convenience store, abducted 3 people inside, then raped and murdered them.
- Executed in April 2013.



# What had convenience stores become?

- During the crack epidemic, convenience stores became a place for drug dealers and prostitutes to hang out and ply their trades.
- Good people stayed away from the locations, further projecting the image to would-be robbers that this is a suitable target.



S.A.R.A.

# Response

Brainstorming for interventions

Other cities with similar problems

Outlining the response plan

Executing the plan

# The Beginning

- Chapter 28, Section 13 of the City of Houston Municipal Ordinances was passed in 2008
- Initially rolled out to only one patrol division as a test, registration and education only, at this point.
- The Differential Response Team (DRT) was charged with enforcement.
- Rolled out city wide in 2009, continuing registration and education... no citations were issued at this point.
- Full implementation was instituted in 2010, holding owners accountable for failing to comply with the ordinance, however education was still always the focus.

# The Ordinance

- The Task Force reported back to Mayor White that a municipal ordinance was needed to require all convenience stores within the City of Houston to implement a list of best practices at their locations and take active steps to prevent crime at their locations.
- The goal was to keep this from being overly burdensome to owners, but sufficient enough to protect the citizens of Houston.
- The ordinance consisted of 8 pillars, requiring training, infrastructure, and policy mandates.

# First Requirement - Registration

- Stores are required to register with the Houston Police Department **FREE OF CHARGE** via the internet through [www.houstonpolice.org](http://www.houstonpolice.org)
- Operating a store without registering shall be a criminal violation
- HPD sent out a registration packet with a registration certificate, a door window decal, robbery prevention information and a CD with a training video



Registration Window Decal



HPD Home Organization Get Informed Join Us Multimedia Registrations Services Contact HPD Helpful Links

www.houstontx.gov > Houston Police Department

## Houston Police Department



The mission of the Houston Police Department in the city of Houston by working cooperatively crime, enforce the law, preserve the peace, and

Accident Report Blue Form

Alarm Permits

Apartment Registration

Convenience Store Registration

Public Safety Video Program

Share



### Meet the Chief



Charles McClelland was sworn in as Chief of the Houston Police Department on April 14, 2010. He has served 35 years at the Houston Police Department, joining the department as a patrol officer in 1977 and rising through ranks to his current position as Chief of Police. His management experience has touched virtually every aspect of law enforcement throughout his career with the Houston Police Department.

His duties include managing the 5th largest police agency in the United States with an annual budget of more than \$695 million dollars and a staff of 5400 sworn police officers and more than 1600 civilian employees. Chief McClelland is a proponent of community-based policing and enhanced crime reduction strategies with the use of technology. He has dedicated his entire adult life to public service and improving the quality of life in the city of Houston.

Chief McClelland holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminology and a Master of Arts degree in Sociology from the University of Houston. He is a graduate of the Federal Bureau of Investigations National Academy, the Federal Bureau of Investigation National Executive Institute and has received numerous awards and commendations.

Chief McClelland was born in Center, Texas. He has two daughters, Ashley and Brittany.



### Need a copy of a report?

Purchase a copy of a traffic accident report (for accidents that have occurred since 1-1-08)

Need a copy of a Police Report?



### News Releases

News releases published by the Houston Police Department, Public Affairs Division.



### Crime Statistics

View the crime statistics in your area.

### Contact the Department

For **Emergency / Life Threatening Calls**

**9-1-1**

HPD Dispatch Center

Non-emergency Calls

713-884-3131

## Department Links

- HPD Home Page
- Organization
  - Chiefs Message
  - Organization Chart
- Divisions
  - Auto Theft
  - Crime Lab
  - Robbery
  - Special Operations
  - Vice
- Beat Map
- Patrol Stations and Storefronts
- Careers
- Mission Statement
- Get Informed
  - Blog
  - Crime Prevention
  - Crime Statistics
  - Crime Stoppers
  - Department Reports
  - Fallen Officers
  - Family Violence
  - Find my towed car
  - HPD Jail Inquiry
  - ID Safety
  - Immigration
  - Keep Houston Safe
  - Mediation Process
  - News Releases
  - Officers in Action
  - Racial Profiling
  - Safe Clear
  - Traffic Control
  - Truck Enforcement Unit
  - Victim Services
- Join Us
  - Careers
  - Citizens Police Academy
  - Volunteers
- Multimedia
  - Podcasts
  - Videos
  - Fallen Officers
- Registrations



## Convenience Store Task Force

1200 Travis, 18th Floor  
Houston, TX 77002  
713.308.1860

### Registration

All convenience stores located in the City of Houston are required to register online with the Houston Police Department. This will facilitate greater positive interaction between the Houston Police Department and the convenience store community and to improve data tracking concerning crimes around convenience stores. Once a convenience store has successfully registered, the store will be provided with a security packet that will include an internet link to security training so that storeowners can provide training to their employees. Storeowners will also be provided with a decal to be displayed at the entrance to the business and a registration certificate. Contact can be made directly by email at [ConvenienceStoreTaskForce@HoustonPolice.org](mailto:ConvenienceStoreTaskForce@HoustonPolice.org) to request information or to have questions answered. New Registration or Update information on a store that is already registered can be made through the links below. Once the registration packet is received, the owner/manager needs to contact the Task Force by email or telephone to let the Police Department know that the information was received.

[Online Registration](#)
[Update Information](#)
[Trespass Affidavits](#)
[Training Video](#)

## Key components of the Convenience Store Ordinance

### The Municipal Ordinance includes, but is not limited to:

#### 1.) (sec. 28-402) Registration of Convenience Store

All convenience stores located in the City of Houston are required by ordinance to register with the Houston police Department.

#### 2.) (sec. 28-403) Employee, Manager, and Supervisor training

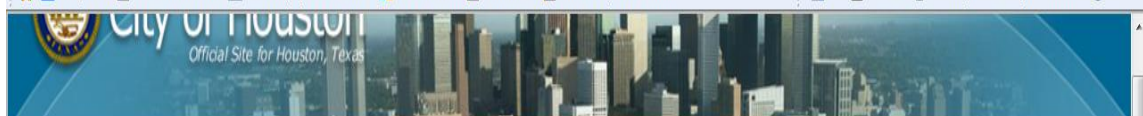
All employees, managers, and supervisors are required to view the Training Video provided by the Police Department. The packet that all stores will receive once they register, contains the internet link to the video. ([Link to page with safety training videos](#)) ([Download Training Log](#))

#### 3.) (sec. 28-404) Trespass Affidavit

All Convenience Stores must have a Trespass Affidavit on file with the Houston Police Department. You can submit the original Notarized Trespass Affidavit form and Complainant Data Sheet to your nearest storefront substation for filing. A copy of the affidavit only must be posted at the Convenience Store in a place always accessible to public view. You may call the Convenience Store Registration Unit if you have any questions concerning Trespass Affidavit. ([Click here for Substations and Store Front locations](#)). ([Click here to download Trespass Affidavit and Complainant Data Sheet](#)).

#### 4.) (sec. 28-405) Security Signs and Height Strip

All Convenience Stores must have "No Loitering" and "No Trespassing" signs in at least two inch lettering or larger, in English and Spanish, posted on the front, sides, and rear of the store. Convenience Stores must also have height strips posted at all public exits.



Home I Want To... Government Residents Business Departments Visitors En Espanol

www.houston.tx.gov > Police > Convenience Store > Convenience Store Registration Form



## Houston Police Department

### Department Links

- HPD Home Page
- Organization
  - Chiefs Message
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- Divisions
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  - Careers
  - Mission Statement
- Get Informed
  - Blog
  - Crime Prevention
  - Crime Statistics
  - Crime Stoppers
  - Department Reports
  - Fallen Officers
  - Family Violence
  - Find my towed car

### Convenience Store Registration Form.

The date and time of your submission is automatically generated when you click SUBMIT. Please complete all required fields.

#### STORE INFORMATION (New Application)

\* Store Name:

\* Sales Tax Number:

\*Store Address:

\*Store Phone:

Fax:

\* City:

\* State:

\* Zip Code:

# REGISTRATION VERIFICATION



## CONVENIENCE STORE CERTIFICATE OF REGISTRATION



**NAME OF STORE**  
**ADDRESS**  
**CITY, STATE ZIP**

*This certificate is issued by the Houston Police Department to certify compliance with the registration requirements of City of Houston Code of Ordinances Sec. 28-402.*



# CONVENIENCE STORE AWARD OF DISTINCTION

Date

NAME OF STORE

ADDRESS

CITY, STATE ZIP



***This store has met all of the requirements outlined on  
Section 28 of the COH Code of Ordinances without  
any violations.***

# Second Requirement - Training

- Requires that all employees, managers and immediate supervisors of managers must complete a safety training program annually.
- A training log must be maintained on site.
- Training focused on cash handling, employee safety, robbery prevention, and what to do in a robbery.
- Six languages were offered for the training videos: English, Chinese Mandarin, Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean and Urdu.
- CD's were originally sent out in the registration packet, but HPD later created several web pages on You Tube.

# Convenience Store Training Log

**Convenience Store Name:**

**Convenience Store Address:**

	Employee Name	Date of Training	Time	Employee Signature
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				
16				
17				
18				
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22				
23				
24				
25				
26				
27				
28				
29				
30				

333  
views

by houstonpolicedept 131 views

## Third Requirement – Trespass Affidavit

- The owner of the store shall execute a signed, notarized, trespass affidavit with the police department so that HPD can enforce the applicable trespass laws on the owner's behalf on the store owner.
- Many owners and clerks were afraid to approach and confront the criminals that hang out in front of their business
- Clerks didn't have to risk confrontation and possible retaliation, they could call HPD

# TRESPASS AFFIDAVIT

My name is \_\_\_\_\_ . I am the \_\_\_\_\_  
(Printed Name) (Owner/Agent of the Owner)

of the property located at \_\_\_\_\_, Houston, Texas \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_ (Street Address) \_\_\_\_\_ (Zip  
 Code)

I hereby request and authorize the HOUSTON POLICE DEPARTMENT to enter the premises at

said location and, in my absence, to enforce all applicable trespass laws on my behalf in regard to

the above referenced property. I further request that on my behalf, the HOUSTON POLICE

DEPARTMENT request all persons who are not patrons in the normal course of business to

Immediately leave the property or be arrested pursuant to Section 30.05 of the Texas Penal Code.

“NO TRESPASSING” signs have been posted throughout the property.

In addition, I, or my designee, will cooperate fully in the prosecution of anyone who is arrested

for a violation of any local or state law.

My business address is \_\_\_\_\_ . My business phone number is \_\_\_\_\_ .

(Signature)

Subscribed and sworn to me on this the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_, to  
certify which witness my hand and seal of office.

NOTARY PUBLIC IN AND FOR  
THE STATE OF TEXAS

# Fourth Requirement - Signage

- Made mandatory that “No Trespassing” signs be posted in English and Spanish on all sides of the building.
- It also requires that a height strip be posted at the main entrance/ exit of the store.
- GHRA, one of HPD’s main partners on the Task Force, offers free to its members a packet providing the necessary signage and height strips to facilitate compliance with their member stores.



**NO TRESPASSING**

**VIOLATORS WILL  
BE PROSECUTED**

**NO TRESPASE**

**LOS VIOLADORES  
SERAN PROCESADOS**

# Fifth Requirement – Unobstructed View

- Stores are required to maintain an unobstructed line of sight allowing a clear view of and from the cash register and sales transaction area through all windows and public access doors.
- Could **YOU** see a robbery in progress through all this?



# Sixth Requirement – Hold Up Alarm

- Convenience stores shall have a silent panic or holdup alarm system, with a button in reach of the cash register and out of sight of the customer.
- Signs are required to be posted at the entrances and exits stating that an alarm security system is in use.



# Seventh Requirement – Cash Handling

- Stores must have a cash handling and accountability policy in place which states maximum amounts of money to be kept in the registers.
- Stores are required to have a limited access drop safe in place which is bolted to the floor.
- Signs at the entrance that state employees do not have access to the safe and have minimum amounts of cash on hand are also required.
- Armored car service was suggested as a requirement, but ultimately left as merely a recommendation.



This is secure.....Right?

# ***NOTICE***

**EMPLOYEES  
DO NOT HAVE  
ACCESS TO SAFE**

# Eighth Requirement - Cameras

- A ***minimum*** of two, color, digital high-resolution cameras were required for all convenience stores.
- One camera must have an overall view of the counter/register area and the other camera a view of the main entrance/ exit area.
- Both cameras shall display the time and date of the recording.
- Security cameras are required to run at all times, including when the store is not open for business in hopes that would reduce burglaries and ATM smash and grabs.

# Cameras continued

- Store owners are required to maintain a library of the recorded digital images for not less than 30 days
- Mandatory to provide a police investigator with a copy of the video of the crime in a timely manner
- Signs stating the location was under camera surveillance were required at all entrances to the location



Old Low-Res Black and White Cameras



HD Night Vision Digital Cameras

# **SECURITY NOTICE**



**THIS PROPERTY  
IS PROTECTED BY  
VIDEO SURVEILLANCE**

# Compliance

- In 2009, implementation was limited to one police district and focused only on registration and education
- In 2010, the program rolled out to the entire city still focusing on registration and education
- In 2011, warnings were issued for non-compliance and citations were only issued to those who had still refused to register, and had been previously warned.
- In 2012, citations were issued for non-compliance for any portion of the ordinance where locations had previously been warned.
- Citations are limited to \$500.00 per violation. Typically if a location came into compliance after the citation was issued, it would be dismissed or plead significantly down at trial.

S.A.R.A.

## **Assessment**

Determine the plan was implemented

Collecting pre/post data

Were goals attained

New strategies to augment plan

Ongoing assessment

# Results

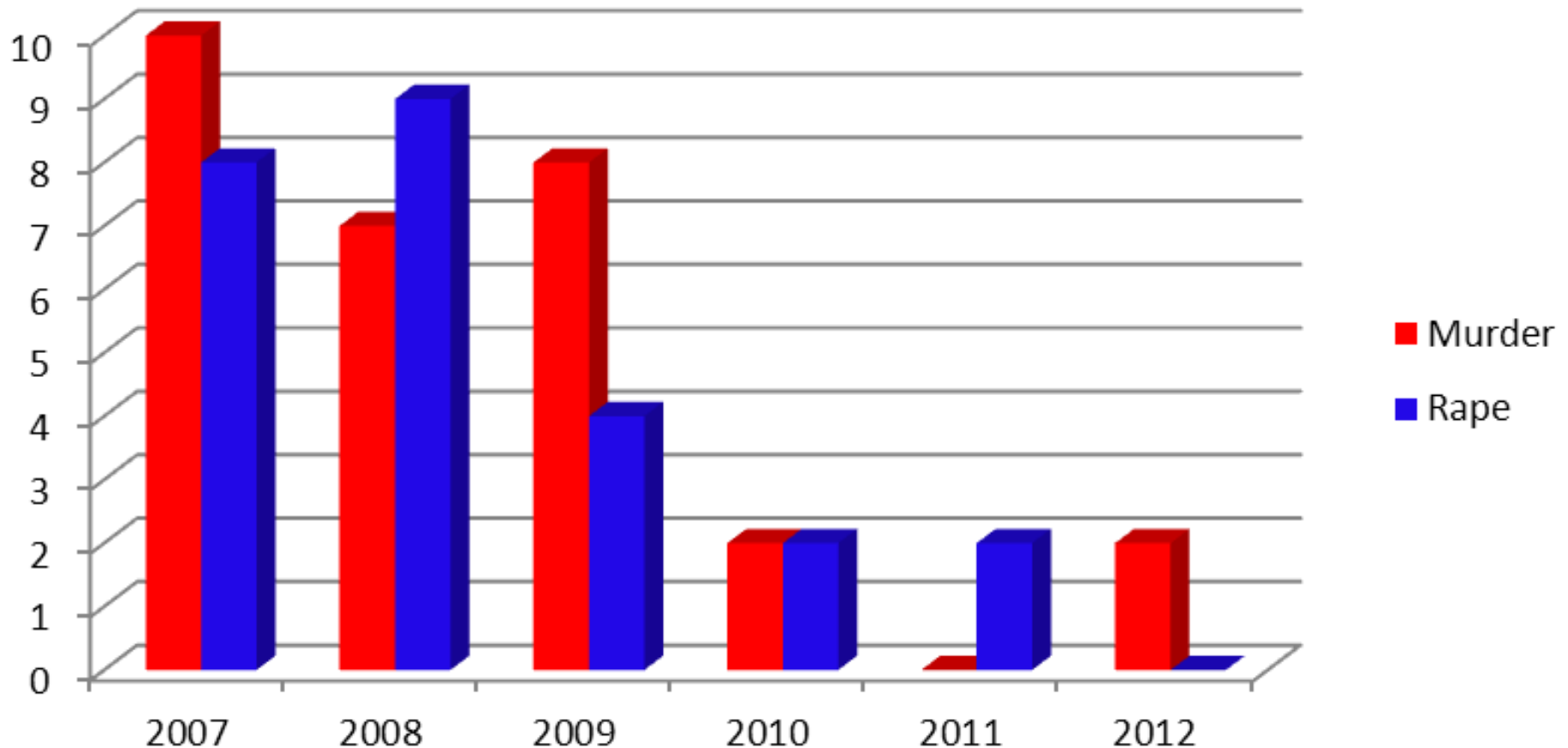
## • 2007 vs. 2012 Crime Statistics

- Murder ↓ 80 %
- Sexual Assault ↓ 75%
- Robbery ↓ 77%
- Aggravated Assault ↓ 77%
- Burglary ↓ 56%



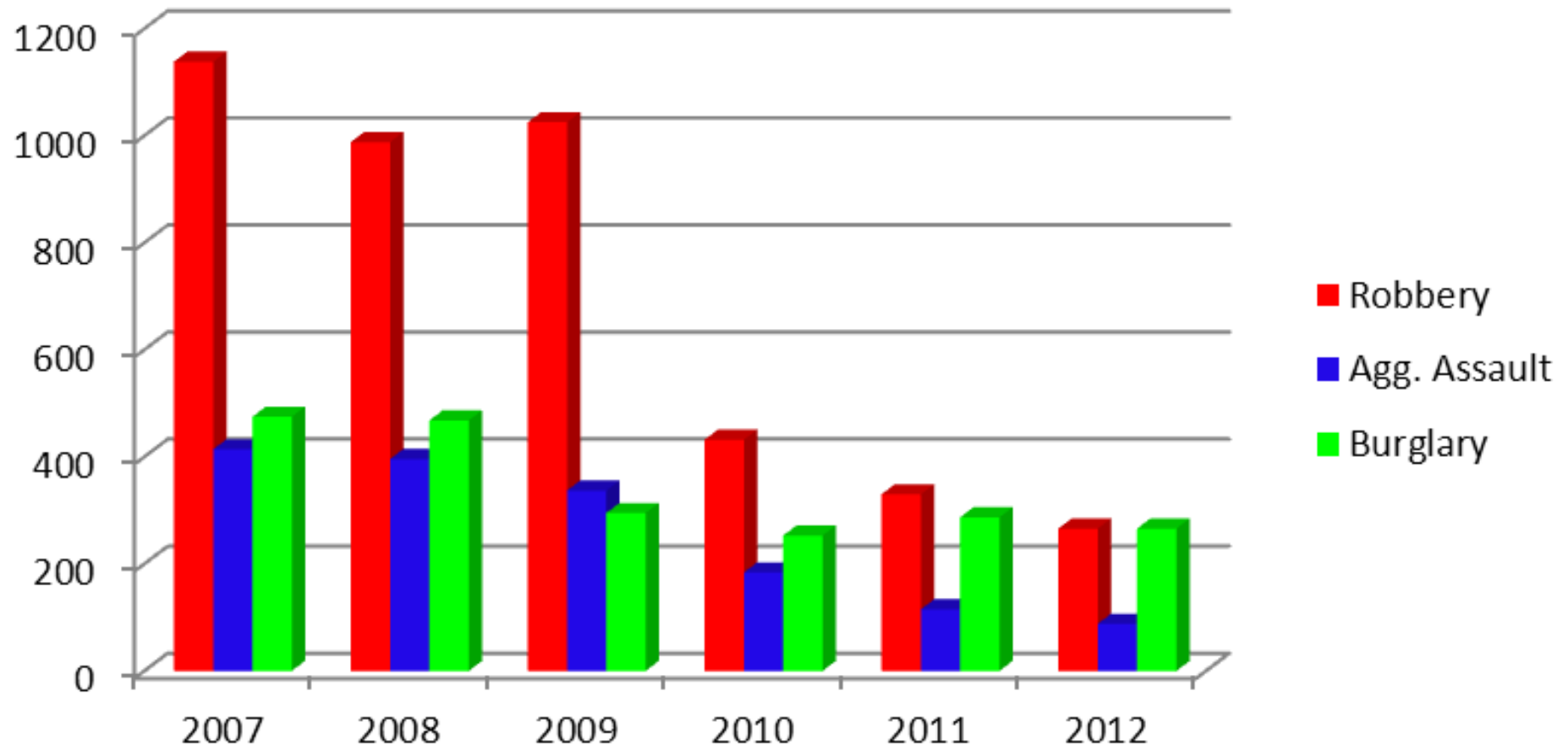
	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Murder	10	7	8	2	0	2
Rape	8	9	4	2	2	0
Robbery	1138	988	1025	432	330	266
Agg. Assault	414	396	337	184	115	88
Burglary	475	468	295	253	287	266

# Murder and Rape 2007 - 2012



The ordinance went into full effect city wide in 2010

# Robbery, Agg. Assault & Burglary 2007 - 2012



The ordinance went into full effect city wide in 2010

# Displacement

- An unintended side effect of the ordinance was displacement of convenience store robberies into discount retail stores (dollar type stores).
- However, the number of violent crimes in these stores does not come anywhere close to the previous numbers seen in convenience stores.
- The Vice President of Loss Prevention for one of the large, national discount retail store chains came to HPD to ask why they were seeing an uptick in robberies in the Houston area. DRT officers went to all of that chain's locations in the North Command police district and following the model convenience store ordinance, made recommendations to reduce the robberies.

# Program Maintenance

- Every March, DRT inspects every single convenience store in the City of Houston to check for continued compliance and locate new convenience stores.
- HPD is continually updating the website to make registration easier
- HPD has switched from training material on CD to YouTube, and has increased to six languages.
- HPD has a direct line of communication with GHRA, so that the DRT can directly address any issues or concerns that the convenience stores have.
- HPD is invited to all the local petroleum retailers and GHRA conferences to further educate attendees on the ordinance and robbery prevention

# For More Information

- Sgt. Mike Hill – City Wide DRT Coordinator  
[mike.hill@houstonpolice.org](mailto:mike.hill@houstonpolice.org)
- Ofc. Ryan Watson – Asst. City Wide DRT Coordinator  
[ryan.watson@houstonpolice.org](mailto:ryan.watson@houstonpolice.org)

