

Problem Solving Quarterly

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Focusing on Crime and Disorder in Mobile Home Parks

By Sgt. Bill Farley

Gaston County, North Carolina-- According to **The New York Times**, mobile homes were the fastest growing type of dwelling in the 1980s. Nearly 16 million Americans, about 1 in 16, now live in mobile homes. Rural America contains the highest concentration of mobile homes, and many of these residents live below the poverty line.

In Gaston County, a rural/suburban, 365-square mile area of approximately 80,000 people, a problem-solving unit called COPE, Citizen-Oriented Police Enforcement, was formed to address some of the specific problems facing mobile home parks in the unincorporated areas of Gaston County. Most of the parks are nice, respectable places. And others could be

described as slums. Owners often charge \$100 a week for rent (including power), and in some cases that is the only service provided.

The police department was first alerted to the problems in mobile home parks after analyzing its call load. The **department** received a disproportionate number of calls from parks across the county, and a look at these calls revealed some patterns. During a three-month period, sixty-five percent of the calls from the parks were complaints from residents about domestic disputes, robberies, loud music, loud noise, and civil disturbances.

At first, the officers had difficulty even finding all the mobile home parks because there was no comprehensive list available from **any** county agency. Officers compiled different lists from various county agencies, such as health, emergency services, tax, and planning. Officers identified over 200 parks in Gaston County, but would stumble upon new parks every day. COPE officers gave the list of parks to patrol officers to see if COPE officers had

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Finding Time For Problem Solving

By Tom McEwen

One of the debates **you** sometimes hear concerns whether officers **have enough** time to do problem-solving activities. On the one hand, officers complain that they are going from call to call and don't have time for **anything** else. On the other **hand, administrators** say there is plenty of time for problem solving because calls only account for 50 to 60 percent of **an** officer's time.

Who is right? In a sense, both sides are correct. Table 1 (page 4) describes a **hypothetical** workload during a unit's shift.

In this example from Table 1, the **unit** starts the shift at 4:00 p.m. and receives **an** accident call at 4:14 p.m., which takes until 4:44 p.m. (30 minutes). The next call (robbery) comes

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(Gaston County, cont. from page 1)

missed any other mobile home parks. The unit's efforts even earned tax money for the county by finding new mobile home properties that had not been previously assessed.

Citizen involvement is an important part of the COPE unit's effort to deal with problems in the mobile home parks. COPE officers went door-to-door and surveyed all park residents, collecting information on problems residents experienced. Residents complained of thefts, drug dealing, domestic disputes, and inadequate sanitation and maintenance by park owners.

To alleviate theft problems in the parks, the COPE officers began another door-to-door campaign to encourage residents to mark their valuable property with a police-supplied engraver. Officers also distributed Operation I. D. stickers for residents to display on doors and windows to discourage burglars.

Nearly 16 million Americans, about 1 in 16, now live in mobile homes.

COPE officers discovered in one park that the owner turned a blind eye to the drug dealing and refused to cooperate to rid the park of drugs. Residents suspected that the owner was receiving money from dealers in exchange for his silence about the illegal activity. When it became clear that the owner would not cooperate in ridding his property of drug dealing, COPE officers filed a civil nuisance suit against him. His assets were frozen, including his personal and business

checking accounts. Thereafter the owner started working to reduce the drug activity on his property.

The COPE unit began publishing a monthly newsletter, Park News, for owners of the mobile home parks to publicize the COPE unit and its purpose. After the county instituted new zoning regulations in the parks, the owners organized a county-wide Manufactured Home Owners Association for the estimated 25,000 owners across the county. The COPE unit facilitated communications between the owners to assist them in organizing the association.

The COPE unit conducted major clean-up efforts at two parks. With assistance from citizens sentenced to community service and the county's engineering department, the group towed away 12 truckloads of trash from a single park. Assistance was solicited from the health department, the solid waste control office, and the housing codes agency. Under the county's housing code, homes that do not meet the minimum requirements cannot be rented. Park owners who did not comply with the regulations were closed down.

Just prior to last year's Christmas season, COPE officers worked with the county's volunteer fire department to bring a fire safety education campaign to the mobile home parks. Officers were concerned about the increased potential for fatal fires because of the lights and trees set up during the Christmas season.

While mobile homes are less likely to experience a fire than standard homes, the damage and loss in a mobile home is much

greater when a fire occurs. According to **The New York Times**, "[while] the rate of fire fatalities is seven per thousand in houses, it is 17 per thousand in mobile homes. The extra deadliness is probably because the dense packing on mobile homes give fires quicker and more violent combustion, fire experts say."

When the park owner turned a blind eye to drug dealing, the COPE unit filed a civil nuisance suit against the owner.

Volunteer firefighters drove through the mobile home parks and distributed fire safety literature and spoke to residents about hazards which cause fires during the Christmas season. During Christmas 1990, Gaston County experienced several mobile home fires. In the 1991 season, they had none.

The success of the COPE unit is encouraging to everyone in the department. This is the only program of its type in the state and the only such program in a rural area. Gaston County Police Chief Tom McCarthy has shown tremendous support for the unit and its effort. Officers are attempting to solve problems rather than just responding to them. And in the COPE unit they are sending a message to park owners that running a park involves providing safe, decent and affordable housing, not just collecting the rent.

Sgt. Bill Farley is commander of the COPE unit in the Gaston County (NC) Police Department.

Leading the Change: A New Vision of Policing

By Darrel W. Stephens

What's wrong with policing in America? Many law enforcement professionals would say that nothing is wrong with policing that more cops, tougher judges, and additional prisons wouldn't cure. They would say there have been significant improvements in policing over the past 20 to 25 years.

They might argue that training is better; a much higher proportion of officers are college graduates; and there has been significant growth in the number of minorities and women. As for the increased workload many police departments have experienced, we just need more cops. As for whether we really **have an impact** on crime, we just need tougher judges and more jail space to accommodate those who should be incarcerated.

Until we correct our vision, we will continue to react to criminal incidents rather than prevent them.

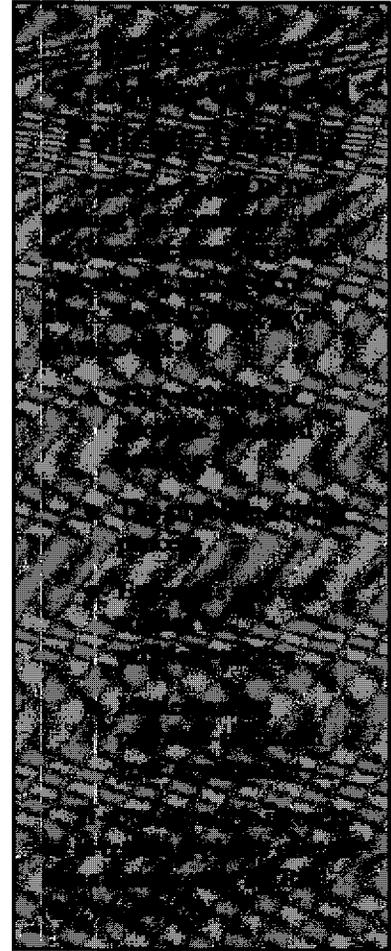
Of course these police officers and academics are correct in their observations about these improvements made in policing, but many of them are increasingly discovering that they are absolutely wrong in their conclusion that more cops, tougher judges, and more jails are the cure.

Much of what is wrong with policing in America is that we **continue to emphasize internal police activities separate from what they are supposed to** achieve. For example, we continue to emphasize the number of police cars we have, or the number of cops on foot patrols, not what the cops are supposed to be doing. We count arrests and summonses, not whether drug dealing on a specific street corner has been eliminated or reduced.

Citizens who live in communities where police focus on means not ends generally support their police; yet these citizens still, too often, live in fear and those who can afford it invest in alarm systems and private security to increase their sense of safety. Policing can't be doing all that well then if the citizens are afraid to live in their communities.

Police, then, must shift their approach, and make citizens and the problems of citizens their primary focus. This shift requires the police to direct their energy and resources outward on the business of policing rather than inward on activities that improve the organization and its image but fall well short of **making a** difference in the quality of life of citizens we serve. It requires that our internal activities—training, information storage and processing, policy **development**, and **even personnel evaluations**—have a clear **and** direct relationship to the activities of **engaging** the community **and** solving **community** problems.

Until we correct our vision, we will continue to emphasize internal activities that focus on reacting to criminal incidents rather than preventing them.



And we will continue to be supported by some members of the community while alienated from others. The police play a critical role in society's response to crime and violence, but we only have an impact when we shift our focus to the community and its problems. Chiefs must take the time to understand why what we do in policing isn't effective enough, **and** that more of the same (i.e. more cops) will not reduce the incidence of crime, fear and disorder problems the citizens in our communities experience.

Darrel Stephens is the executive director of PERF and former chief of police in Newport News, Virginia.

Table 1: Hypothetical Example of a Unit's Workload During a Shift

Activity	Time Dispatched	Time Cleared	Time on Call	Time to Next Call
Start of Shift	4:00 p.m.			14 minutes
Accident	4:14	4:44 p.m.	30 minutes	18
Robbery	5:02	5:18	16	17
Suspicious Activity	5:35	6:38	63	32
Family Problem	7:10	7:40	30	28
Theft	8:08	8:26	18	10
Alarm	8:36	8:46	10	47
Emotionally Disturbed Person	9:33	11:21	108	17
Unwanted Person	11:38	11:49	11	11
End of Shift	12:00 a.m.			
Total			286 minutes	194 minutes

(Finding Time, cont. from p. 1)

in at 5:02 p.m., which means 18 minutes elapsed between calls. The pattern continues **throughout** the shift alternating between **handling** calls for service and having time for other activities. In total, the unit devotes 4 hours 46 minutes (286 minutes) to calls, with the remaining 3 hours 14 minutes (194 minutes) available for other activities.

The time between calls is the key element of the argument on whether officers have time for problem solving. In this example, over three hours are available for other activities. An administrator would be correct in pointing out that there is plenty of time available. However, the available time is spread **throughout** the shift, varying from 10 minutes between calls to 47 minutes. If we assume a problem-solving project takes 45 minutes*, then the officer in

this unit has only one block of **uninterrupted** time for an assignment. The average time between calls is 21 minutes. Officers feel they are going from call to call with no time for **anything** else because of the relatively short periods of time between calls.

*[*Note: Clearly not all problem-solving projects take 45 minutes each day. Some days, all that is needed is 10 minutes to complete a phone call to, perhaps, a building inspector. On other days, let's say Friday or Saturday night, no work will be done on the POP project. POP projects have no due dates, therefore, problem-solving efforts might be best thought of as being accomplished in bits and pieces, not over the course of a day but over the course of a longer period of time. Departments, however, should be striving to find uninterrupted time for officers so that officers can increase their proactive responsibilities.]*

Of course, not all units and all shifts will have the same experience as in this example. Time between calls varies considerably depending on the number of calls for a particular shift, the types of calls, and how much time they require. One or two fewer calls can make a big difference in whether there will be stretches of uninterrupted time.

One commander, who is active in problem solving, has described citizen calls as a "necessary nuisance." Obviously, citizen calls are important and cannot be ignored. But the aim should be to handle citizen calls in an efficient and expedient manner. Here are four specific ways to overcome the problem of finding time for problem solving, while still handling calls effectively.

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(Finding Time, cont. from p. 4)

I. Allow units to perform problem-solving assignments as self-initiated activities. Under this **approach, a unit** would contact the dispatcher **and go out of service for a problem-solving assignment.** The unit would be interrupted only for an emergency call in its area of **responsibility.** Otherwise, the dispatcher would hold **non-emergency** calls until the **unit becomes available or send a unit** from an adjacent area after holding the call for a predetermined amount of time. This approach obviously requires call codes for problem-solving activities **and** a procedure in the communications center for delaying calls.

2. Schedule one or two units to devote a predetermined part of their shift to problem solving.

As an example, a supervisor could **designate** one or two units each day to devote the first half of their shift or even just one hour to problem solving. Their calls would be handled by other units so that they have an uninterrupted block of time for problems. Of course, this approach means that the other units will be busier. The tradeoff is that problem solving gets done and the supervisor can rotate the units **designated** for these activities.

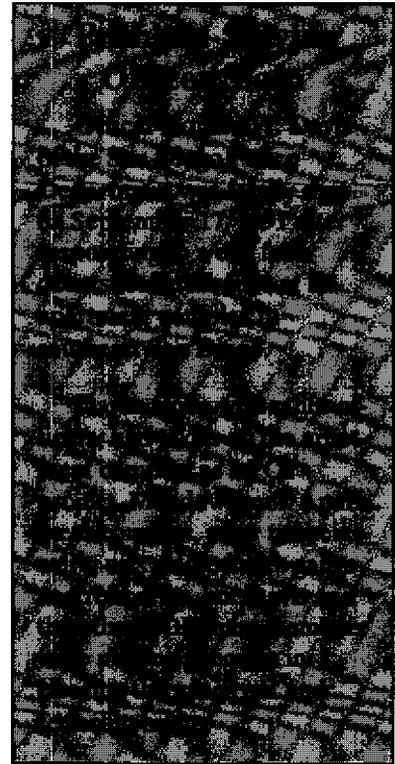
3. Take more reports over the telephone. Most departments **take** certain **non-emergency** complaints by telephone rather than **dispatching** a patrol unit. The information about the incident is recorded on a department report form and entered in the department's information system as **an** incident or crime. The **average** telephone report taker can process four times as many report calls per hour compared

to a field unit. It may be possible that the department can increase the types of calls handled by telephone, or the staffing for a telephone report unit can be increased to cover more hours of the day.

4. Review the department policy on "assist" units. In some departments, several units show up at the scene of a call even though they are not needed. Some units assist out of boredom or curiosity. The units may initiate themselves out of service to assist or the dispatcher may send several units to the scene. This problem is particularly acute with alarm calls. Many departments have a policy of dispatching two or more units to alarms, even when the source has a long history of false alarms. A department should undergo a detailed study on the types of calls for which assist units are actually appearing, with the aim of reducing the number of assists. In addition, officers should be discouraged from assisting other units unless it is necessary.

As a more general approach, a department should review its patrol plan to determine whether units are fielded in proportion to workload. Time between calls is a function not just of the number of incoming calls, but also of the number of units in the field. More units result in more time between calls.

Indeed, you can calculate the number of units needed to assure that the time between calls averages, for example, 35 minutes. A department may also want to consider changes in officer schedules to have an overlapping shift during busy times of the day, however, adjustments



within a shift may be the more effective approach.

Even after implementing all the specific changes mentioned above, a review of the patrol plan may indicate that more officers are needed. A department may already have a need for additional officers before entering into problem solving. Each police department needs to consider its own situation and set realistic objectives for patrol operations. These objectives could include the amount of time to be devoted to calls for service, average time between calls, average travel time to emergency calls, and many other items.

The number of units needed to accomplish these objectives **can** be calculated, **and** a determination made as to whether additional officers will be required. However, **departments** are encouraged to look to **realigning in-**

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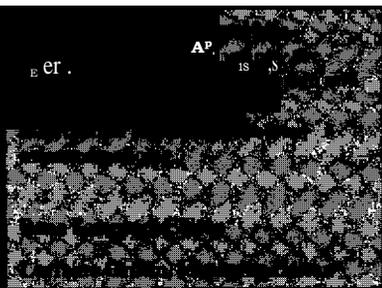
1992 POP Conference Will Feature Dynamic Speakers

The Third National Problem-Oriented Policing (POP) Conference, to be held in San Diego from Oct. 14-16, 1992, will bring together a **distinguished** group of presenters.

"Although the conference will continue to be led by practitioners who are experienced problem solvers, police leaders with valuable experience will also share their expertise at the third conference," said John E. Eck, associate director of research for PERF.

Among the featured speakers will be Chris Braiden, superintendent of the Edmonton Police Services, which has pioneered POP in Canada; Clarence Harmon, chief of police in St. Louis Police Department, which is implementing community-based problem solving on a department-wide basis; and Elizabeth Watson, former police chief of the Houston Police Department (and currently a deputy chief of the agency), which has come under fire for embracing community policing.

In addition to the leadership focus of the conference, the meet-



ing will address the means for collaborating with local governments to build strong ties with city agencies. Dennis Nowicki, executive director of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and former chief of police in Joliet, Illinois, and Jack McGrory, city manager of San Diego, will share their ideas on building partnerships and securing political and financial support for implementing problem-solving efforts.

Responding to the need for solid guidance for police on how to work with citizens, the conference will also feature Felice Kirby, associate director of the Citizens Committee of New York, an activist organization that conducts extensive training of both citizen's groups and police; and Molly Wetzel, executive director of "Safe Streets," an innovative program in Oakland, California, that works closely with citizens to address community problems.

The conference will also headline Professor Herman Goldstein of the University of Wisconsin at Madison Law School, who continues to provide national leadership in the development and application of POP.

Representatives from agencies across the country who are experienced in POP will serve as workshop leaders and panel participants to share their experiences with conference attendees.

The conference is co-sponsored by PERF and the San Diego Police Department. For a brochure or more information on the conference, please call **Jennifer Brooks** at PERF at (202) 466-7820.

Crime Prevention Book Helpful to Problem Solvers

For the past decade, the crime prevention unit of the British Home Office has been conducting some of the most thorough and interesting problem-solving efforts ever documented. The crime prevention unit pioneered the concept of situational crime prevention under the leadership of Dr. Ronald Clarke of Rutgers University.

As editor of the new book, **Situational Crime Prevention: Successful Case Studies**, Clarke has assembled many studies from Canada, the United States, Australia, Europe, and Great Britain which examine a wide range of **innovative** and effective crime prevention methods.

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(Finding Time, cont. from p. 5)
ternal resources to find time for problem solving before seeking additional officers.

In summary, time between calls is an important, but frequently overlooked, element of any problem-solving strategy. The overall aim should be to provide officers with uninterrupted amounts of time for problem-solving assignments. There are many ways to accomplish this aim, but they require a concerted planning effort by the department.

Tom McEwen is the principal of the Institute for Law and Justice.

PERF Satire Exposes Community Policing Saboteurs

Every police executive, officer on the streets, city manager, reporter, and citizen who believes their law enforcement agency is engaged in community policing, just because the agency has one-person bike patrol, hosts community meetings or supports other get-closer-to-the-neighborhood tactics, may be surprised to learn that their practices may be just window dressing.

PERF recently released an article that raises the question of whether some agencies are truly committed to community policing. *Helpful Hints for the Tradition-Bound Chief: Ten Things You Can Do to Undermine Community Policing* is a tongue-in-cheek look at how officials can effectively subvert community policing while appearing to support it.

"There are always some police leaders who are reluctant to give innovative approaches a fair shake," said Boise (ID) Police Chief and PERF President Jim Carvino. "This article demonstrates how using progressive strategies in inappropriate situations can **undermine any** long-term change in policing practices — the goal of the tradition-bound chief."

The author, PERF Research Director John Eck, makes suggestions such as, "Make sure that community policing is sold as the panacea for **every ill that plagues** the city, the nation, and civiliza-

tion, **including** the elimination of evils **that range** from crime and racism to infertility and bad taste."

While the PERF article is written as a spoof, traditionalists who are determined to slow the trend toward community policing may see some truth in the tactics Eck describes. "There are progressive police agencies doing the quality community policing work," said Eck. "**Unfortunately**, these efforts are being compromised by departments that **pay** only lip service to community policing by adopting peripheral tactics.

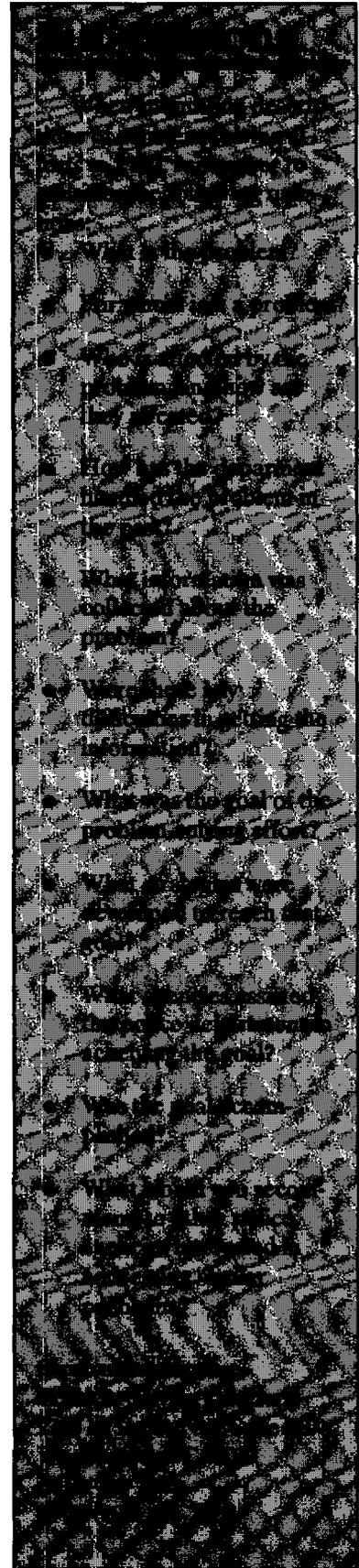
Information on *Helpful Hints* and other PERF publications is available by writing to PERF Publications, 2300 M Street, NW, Suite 910, Washington DC 20037, or calling (202) 466-7820.

(C. P. Book cont. from p. 6)

Although situational crime prevention has much in common with POP, it can be applied by any organization or group, not just the police. A number of reports have been issued by the crime prevention unit detailing efforts to control thefts from vehicles, vandalism, robberies, and a host of other crimes.

Situational Crime Prevention: Successful Case Studies is an excellent resource guide for any serious problem solver, crime prevention specialist, or trainers of the same.

To order the book, contact Harrow and Heston Publishers at 2700 Prosperity Avenue, Fairfax, VA 22031, (703) 204-0411. The book costs \$19.50 for the paperback edition and \$49.50 for the hardcover edition.



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