

HARBOR PLAZA

SAVING A COMMERCIAL DISTRICT THROUGH TARGETED ENFORCEMENT, ENVIRONMENTAL ADJUSTMENTS AND PUBLIC AWARENESS

SANTA ANA POLICE DEPARTMENT, CALIFORNIA, 1993

- THE PROBLEM:** Increased presence of homeless and transient population adjacent to Harbor Plaza commercial district brings with it significant increases of crime and contributes to the deterioration and blight of community.
- ANALYSIS:** Examination of problem revealed that many of the area homeless were responsible for increased crime and that several entities were victims of their behavior. These included merchants who were losing business, surrounding residential communities who also experienced crime and threatening deterioration, the city of Santa Ana which would suffer tax revenue if the commercial district shut down, and area police officers who spent a disproportionate amount of their time in the area responding to calls.
- RESPONSE:** Officers developed a sequential five phase plan which consisted of 1) removing individuals illegally camping along the Santa Ana river bed; 2) targeted reductions in the number of criminals frequenting the Harbor Plaza to a manageable number; 3) removing the remaining criminals and aggressive panhandlers from the Harbor Plaza; 4) implementing environmental changes to the Plaza and; 5) instituting an educational campaign for those working or shopping at the Harbor Plaza.
- ASSESSMENT:** A post implementation survey of Harbor Plaza merchants showed positive results. All merchants reported observing significant decreases in transients as well as increases in the number of patrons visiting their stores. Several reported increased revenues.
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INTRODUCTION

Santa Ana is the tenth largest city in California, and the state's second most densely populated city with; an ethnic makeup of 65 percent Hispanic, 23 percent Anglo, 9 percent Asian, and 2 percent Black. The Santa Ana Police Department is comprised of approximately 600 personnel and delivers services utilizing a Community Oriented Policing philosophy within five autonomous policing districts. In 1990, Chief Paul Walters designated the Westend

District as the department's "Developmental Policing District" in which Problem Oriented Policing may be nurtured and developed for department-wide implementation.

As throughout the United States, the City of Santa Ana has experienced a dramatic increase in the transient/homeless population. Such an influx has led to a significant increase of crimes of all types and contributes to the deterioration and blight of neighborhoods. It also serves as

a "visible sign of disorder" to the community and a constant reminder of governments' inability to deal with complex issues.

One such issue came to the forefront of the Santa Ana Police Department's Westend District. Property management and storeowners of the Harbor Plaza complained of a loss in business due to an "increase of crime. The Harbor Plaza is a large commercial complex with over 110,000 square feet of leasable space and is located on the corner of two heavily traveled thoroughfares. Vons Market anchors the center, which houses 30 stores, including Osco, Southern California Edison Company Payment Center, and two fast-food restaurants. A meeting was held between members of the Westend District's Community Policing Team and store owners/managers in which aggressive panhandling, auto burglaries and narcotic activity were identified as major problems for the center.

SCANNING

An analysis of the problem was initiated by the officers of the Community Policing Team. Data including reports and calls for service at the shopping center were studied. Businesses were surveyed to determine what criminal acts were being committed and with what frequency (see Appendix 1). Panhandling was clearly the greatest problem identified by surveyed businesses.

Surveillance was conducted at the center. Officers observed extremely aggressive panhandlers who intimidate and obstruct customers, mostly female Hispanic and Asian, in order to obtain money, and frequented fast-food restaurants and the Southern California Edison Payment Center where customers were known to carry cash. They also offered to wash vehicle windshields for compensation and solicited "work for money," using signage, including some falsely impersonating as military veterans. Contact with 15 panhandlers revealed all were drug addicts, who admitted to using monies panhandled to purchase narcotics. The surveillance also determined "window washers"

were responsible for many of the auto burglaries and were more interested in casing vehicles than cleaning windshields. Several environmental issues were also found to be contributory factors to the center's problems.

During this same time period, the transient population in the Westend District increased, due to: (1) The enforcement of a newly adopted "no camping" ordinance in the city's Civic Center Plaza, which contains all city, county, state, and federal government buildings; and (2) the closure of a nearby park to build a modern city yard facility. These factors contributed to the relocation of many transients to the Santa Ana Riverbed within the Westend District, where street overpasses were used for shelter and the construction of makeshift housing. The primary locations within the Riverbed where transients gathered were approximately five blocks from the Harbor Plaza.

Members of the Community Policing Team videotaped the living conditions along the Santa Ana Riverbed in an attempt to gain support from several outside agencies to rid the area of illegal activities. A viewing of the video revealed the panhandlers at the Harbor Plaza were the same individuals who were illegally camping along the Santa Ana Riverbed. Officers' personal observations as well as a review of the videotape clearly showed the involvement of other illegal activities, including prostitution, narcotic activity, and property crimes.

ANALYSIS

After linking the problems of the Harbor Plaza and the illegal activity of those residing in the Santa Ana Riverbed, four groups of individuals were identified as being victimized by this problem:

1. Harbor Plaza Shopping Center merchants complained of a loss of business due to the illegal activity. Several, including the anchor store of Vons Market, were considering pulling out of the center, which would threaten its very existence;

2. Citizens and businesses located in neighborhoods adjoining the Santa Ana Riverbed suffered an increase of crime and the deterioration of their neighborhoods. Should the plaza close down, the community would also lose the convenience and use of a neighborhood shopping center. Customers of the Harbor Plaza could not conduct business without being harassed by panhandlers;

3. The City of Santa Ana suffered the loss of tax revenue, due to the decrease of sales at the center. Should the center close, additional and significant monetary loss would be encumbered by the city;

4. Westend District Personnel were spending an increasing amount of time on calls for service related to the activities of those illegally camping on the Riverbed and conducting criminal activity at the Harbor Plaza.

Traditional Response

In the past, the Police Department has responded to issues of this type through traditional enforcement and adopting municipal ordinances, such as no camping in the Civic Center and park curfew. The Police Department has also worked closely with service organizations, such as Legal Aid, who represent homeless in lawsuits, and several private organizations who feed and shelter the homeless. These activities have proven successful in the short term but have not gained long-term resolution to the problem. Additionally, the City of Santa Ana has lost civil litigation initiated by advocates of the homeless, in which several hundred thousand dollars was awarded. An injunction has recently been ordered prohibiting the Police Department from enforcing the no camping ordinance until such time as its legality can be determined.

RESPONSE

A review of the data revealed the majority of calls for service and reports pertaining to the criminal activity on the riverbed and at the Harbor Plaza occurred on swing shift. Seven members of the Westend District's swing shift

proposed an intervention to address illegal activities. The response was designed to accomplish three goals: 1) Reduce crimes against persons and property; 2) Reduce the rampant sales and usage of drugs in the area; and 3) Eliminate transients aggressively panhandling -- all of whom were involved in one or both of the previous activities.

A multi-phased program was designed which, if successful, would bring long-term resolution to the neighborhood:

- Phase One - Removal of those individuals illegally camping along the Santa Ana River Bed;
- Phase Two - Dwindle the number of criminals frequenting the Harbor Plaza to a manageable number;
- Phase Three - Rid the remaining criminals and aggressive panhandlers from the Harbor Plaza;
- Phase Four - Implement environmental changes to the Plaza; and
- Phase Five - Institute an educational campaign for those working or shopping at the Harbor Plaza.

In an effort to decrease the city's civil liability, all personnel involved in the implementation of this problem-solving intervention received training from Santa Ana Police Department's Legal Advisor prior to any action. Officers were provided instruction as to what specific sections would be relevant to this project, as well as the expected behavior of all personnel.

Phase One

The enforcement of the Santa Ana Riverbed falls under the jurisdiction of the Orange County Sheriffs Office. Efforts to control the riverbed have met with negative results in the past. A meeting was conducted between the Westend District Commander and the Orange County Sheriffs Officer North Operations Commander, who agreed to work a joint operation on the

Riverbed. Support was solicited and obtained from a Santa Ana Councilman, as well as a member of the Orange County Board of Supervisors to "ensure" the cooperation of other county agencies. On May 6, 1993, a meeting was conducted by personnel from S.A.P.D., O.C.S.O. and the County of Orange Environmental Management Agency (E.M.A.), who is responsible for maintaining the Santa Ana Riverbed. At that meeting, it was decided a joint operation would be conducted between all three agencies to remove those persons illegally camping along the riverbed.

Prior to enforcement activities, flyers were handed out to those residing on the riverbed as well as posted on their living quarters, advising their activities were illegal and on a specified date, an enforcement effort would be conducted. They were also informed, both verbally and in writing, how they could claim any personal property removed from the riverbed.

On May 26, 1993, the Task Force from the Orange County Sheriff's Office, the E.M.A. and the Westend's Community Policing Team began enforcement and cleanup of the Santa Ana Riverbed. The intent of this operation was to have all persons illegally living, lodging or camping under the bridges or elsewhere in the Riverbed to voluntarily leave and take their possessions with them.

Officers were able to gain voluntary compliance and it was not necessary to make any arrests. Any property left or abandoned by those residing illegally on the riverbed was collected and stored by the E.M.A. The operation was videotaped for future use in court, if necessary. During the operation, it was apparent that these persons were involved in illegal activity, due to telltale signs of illegal drug use and prostitution, numerous items obviously stolen, such as golf clubs, car radios, lawn mowers, bicycles etc. Individuals' involvement in the panhandling at the Harbor Plaza was reinforced by the presence of window washing equipment.

Phase Two

The intent of the second and third phase of this intervention was to remove the criminal element from the Harbor Plaza Shopping Center. Officers working both in plainclothes and uniforms, with several means of transportation, including foot beat, bicycle patrol, marked and unmarked units, and a golf cart, patrolled the shopping center and made contact with those persons conducting criminal activity.

Enforcement efforts were geared toward results, not statistics. Over the four-week period of this phase, officers made less than ten arrests, while contacting nearly 100 individuals. The intent of this phase was to make as many consensual contacts as possible to educate and identify offenders and request their compliance in solving this problem. Officers explained the solution, the role the offenders played, and why the police needed their assistance. A short discussion, followed by a voluntary photo, field interview and thumbprint was usually sufficient to have the offenders voluntarily leave the area.

It was during the second phase of the program that officers uncovered additional criminal activity in the area. Through their personal observations, it was apparent that some of the adjoining businesses on Harbor, such as the adult bookstores and several bars, were contributing to the criminal activity in the shopping center. Officers also uncovered a telephone fraud scheme being conducted at several telephone banks within the shopping center. An individual would meet "clients" at the pay phone and accept an amount of money estimated at \$20, for which they would allow the individual to make a telephone call, most of which were international, using a stolen telephone credit cards. Working in conjunction with the Telephone Company, surveillance was conducted and several individuals were arrested.

During officer's conversations with those transients in the shopping center, they were questioned at great extent. Many came from throughout the United States, as far away as New York and Chicago. They advised officers that they came to Los Angeles, California primarily because of the weather, and once they arrived were told by local transients that Santa

Ana was the place to go. They were advised that the City of Santa Ana has the best private subsidized services and the highest quality, lowest priced drugs in the area. They were also informed that Santa Ana had recently lost a court decision involving the homeless and that legal assistance would be provided if necessary, free of charge.

Phase Three

Following Phase Two of this intervention, approximately one dozen individuals remained on the property and would not voluntarily leave. Officers continued to remain on the property, varying their method of operation and time of day. It was at this time that the officers involved themselves in enforcement and "shadowing" strategies. Persons in the parking lot who were washing windows and intimidating customers for payment were advised that without a business license, they could not conduct a window washing business within the city. They were then advised of the procedure by which they may obtain a business license. Through the officers' continual presence, customers were no longer intimidated into giving money. After it became apparent that it would no longer be profitable to work this area, the remainder of the panhandlers left.

Phase Four

During the analysis of this problem-solving program, several environmental issues with the complex were identified as underlying conditions contributing to the problem. Working with the business owners and the property management, several enhancements were made to the center which would prevent the reoccurrence of the criminal activity.

1. Trash dumpsters throughout the center provided both shelter and food for the offenders. The property management company agreed to provide locking lids for the dumpsters, as well as have the private security officers lock the gates to the trash receptacles during closed business hours.

2. & 3. The north alley of the complex was provided for coverage for a number of illegal activities, including prostitution, drug usage, as well as urinating and defecating in public. The property management company agreed to install wrought-iron gates which would be locked after business hours, to prohibit pedestrian traffic from using this area.

4. The northeast parking lot of the complex was the primary congregation spot for criminal activities in parked cars during nighttime hours, such as prostitution and the sale and use of narcotics. The management company agreed to put a chain across the north and south entrances to that parking area after business hours, which would prohibit this activity.

5. Transients were using the restrooms of several of the stores, as well as the two fast food restaurants. All the businesses agreed to lock their bathrooms so they would be accessible to customers only. Businesses either provided a key to customers, or upon request, tokens, which were used to allow entry into the restrooms.

6. A drinking faucet next to the entrance to the Vons Market was found to be used by the panhandlers as either drinking water or water obtained to clean windshields of potential customers vehicles. The Vons Market agreed to relocate this drinking faucet to the rear of the store, which would be accessible to customers without contributing to the problem.

7. Several banks of pay phones were providing the offenders legitimate reason to be loitering in the area while surveillances showed they were not using the telephones. They also acted as "a business center" for prostitution and the sale of narcotics. The telephone company was contacted and several of the telephones were removed. Those remaining were restricted to outgoing calls only and were shut off after 10:00 p. m. Signs were placed on the phones advising of their hours of operation.

8. The lights in front of the Vons Market and Osco Drug Store were burned out and were not being replaced in a timely manner. At nighttime, the darkness provided cover for the offenders'

illegal activity. The markets agreed to provide a more brilliant light, as well as replace them in a timelier manner.

9. Unauthorized parking provided both cover for the prostitution and illegal narcotics activity, as well as potential victims for auto theft and auto burglary. The property management company agreed to have security officers conduct private-property impounds on a regular basis to resolve this issue.

10. Beverage bars at the fast-food restaurants were observed to be one of the primary attractions of the transients to the center. The transients were observed to remove cups from trash receptacles, go into the fast-foot restaurants and obtain a *free* drink and remain there for a lengthy time period. In order to resolve this problem, one of the fast-food restaurants agreed to remove their beverage bar and the other relocated it where it could be kept under better control by employees.

11. The private security at this site had proven to be ineffective. Security officers failed to take action against any of the criminal activity, nor did they report it to the police department. In some cases, the security officers were sympathizing with the offenders and in many ways, contributing to the problem. The property management agreed to hire a new security company to provide private security for the center. The Santa Ana Police Department provided training to the new security officers, advising them of what criminal activity had been taking place, as well as what actions they may take to prevent the reoccurrence of these activities.

Phase Five

The final phase of this intervention is an educational campaign to those customers using the shopping center. Flyers are handed out to customers, as well as placed in business windows advising monies obtained through panhandling are often times used for illegal activity. Customers are provided guidelines as to how to say "no" to panhandlers, as well as the names of legitimate organizations whose

contributions could be made to help the homeless.

ASSESSMENT

A post-survey was conducted of the businesses to determine what *affect* the problem-solving intervention had on the shopping center. The second survey revealed, without exception, each business within the Harbor Plaza had *seen* improvement. All noticed a dramatic decrease of homeless individuals, persons begging and disturbances in the parking lot. Several businesses indicated that they have seen an increase in shoppers and many have received comments from their customers advising that they had noticed a significant improvement in the center. When asked what impact the program had on the sales *of* the individual businesses, one of the fast-food restaurants, Taco Bell, advised their sales had gone up by 50 percent, and the Vons Market informed the police that sales were up by approximately \$8,000 a month, and they were no longer considering leaving the center.

Another result of this intervention was the business owners are forming the Harbor Plaza Business Owners' Association, which will meet on a regular basis with the police department to discuss issues of mutual concern.

Crime Type	April '93	May '93	June '93
Disturbing the Peace	1	0	0
Auto Burglaries	12	7	1
Petty Theft (Shoplifting)	6	4	1 i
Municipal Code Violations	3	4	6
Vice-related Arrests	3	3	6
Narcotic Arrests	2	1	4
Vandalism	3	2	0

A review of the statistics for the months of April, May, and June of 1993, for the shopping center revealed that property crimes in the area

had dropped while shoplifting and other offender-related arrests had gone up. This was an expected outcome. Municipal Code, vice and narcotic violations were up, although, not significantly. This was the specific design of the intervention to resolve the problem with arrests being used as an option only as a last resort. Most of the offenders contacted by officers were warned that their continued violation of the law would result in arrest. Very few individuals ignored this advice.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this problem-solving intervention was to remove the entrenched offenders from the Harbor Plaza and return control of the center to the shopkeepers and management company. A number of individuals, as well as private and public agencies assisted in the successful implementation of this problem-solving intervention. Members of the Santa Ana City Council and Orange County Board of Supervisors greatly assisted in providing their leadership in a timely response to this community problem. The Santa Ana Police Department worked closely with members of the Orange County Sheriffs Office, the Orange County Environmental Management Agency in removing those individuals illegally camping on the Santa Ana Riverbed and their property (filling up five dump trucks). Members of the Westend District also worked closely with the property management company, as well as individual businesses and, in some instances, corporate representatives who acted in partnership to resolve this issue. Through a combination of varied enforcement efforts, environmental changes to the center, and a customer educational campaign, the problems associated with the Harbor Plaza have been resolved, and the program goals have been attained.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Several lessons were learned in the implementation of this problem-solving effort that may assist future interventions:

Training/Supervision - Due to the sensitivity of the offenders in this intervention, as well as the potential

for civil liability, the training conducted prior to any enforcement efforts by the officers was absolutely imperative. Close supervision by the team sergeant and team corporal of the swing shift ensured officers remained focused and upheld the policies and procedures of the police department. During this three-month intervention, officers observed persons, most likely homeless advocates, conducting counter-surveillance on police activities. The training given to officers, as well as the supervision is attributed to the successful attainment of the program's goals without a single citizens' complaint or lawsuit.

Enforcement - It soon became apparent that the use of plainclothes officers in this operation was much more effective than when officers were in uniform. This is attributed to many factors. By the officers working in plainclothes, the criminals in the area could not distinguish between police officers and customers. This had a tremendous deterrent effect, as it appeared to the criminals that the police were always at the center. A second benefit of using plainclothes is the transients appeared much more willing to cooperate with the police. Also, by working in plainclothes, when officers contacted a transient, it did not appear to the public or any passersby that the police department was "harassing" a homeless person.

Focus on Non-arrest Interventions - Arresting individuals has not proven to be an effective means of dealing with this criminal population. By using non-arrest strategies, the chances are greater for success of the program and the liability to the agency is decreased.

Attitude of the Officers - Officers were forceful when necessary with criminals yet respectful of them. This contributed greatly to the offenders' voluntary compliance with the request of the officers and did not necessitate numerous arrests.

Environmental Issues - Officers conducting surveillances at the center soon had a clear understanding of the underlying conditions which were contributing to the offenders frequenting the center. Issues such as the telephones in the area, the beverage bars at the fast-food restaurants, the drinking fountains, and the unlocked and unattended restrooms played a large role in this problem. Had these issues not been addressed, the offenders or

others would have undoubtedly returned to the center upon conclusion of this program.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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APPENDIX I

Santa Ana Police Department
Westend District

Harbor Blvd. Business District Survey

Business _____ Phone _____
Address _____ Hours _____
Contact _____ Circle **D M E**

1. Has your business been the target of a crime since the beginning of the year? What?

2. To your knowledge have your customers been the victims of crime while shopping at this complex? Yes No

3. Have your customers complained to you about crime in this shopping complex? What was their complainant?

4. Have you observed or been the victim of any of the following criminal acts while at this complex? (Circle)

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| A. Panhandling | G. Drinking in Public |
| B. Petty Theft | H. Public Intoxication |
| C. Auto Burglary | I. Urinating in Public |
| D. Narcotic Activity | J. Auto Theft |
| E. Prostitution Activity | K. Robbery |
| F. Gang Activity | L. Fighting in Public |

5. In your opinion which of the above acts seems to occur most often in this complex?

A B C D E F G H I J K L

6. Have you or any of your customers ever been physically accosted by a person panhandling? Yes No Explain.

7. Is there a particular day that seems to be more active than the others?

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

8. What time of the day seems most active?

9. To your knowledge does this complex employ security guards? Yes No

10. Is plaza security effective at impacting the criminal element? Yes No If No why?

11. What would you suggest to eradicate *any of the above* problems?