



THE CITY OF
SAN DIEGO

POLICE DEPARTMENT • 1401 BROADWAY
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101 - 5729 • TELEPHONE (619) 531-2000

OFFICE OF
JERRY SANDERS
CHIEF OF POLICE

96-47

Augusts, 1996

Mr. Chuck Wexler
Executive Director
Police Executive Research Forum
1120 Connecticut Ave., N.W. Suite 930
Washington D.C. 20036

Dear Chuck,

As part of the upcoming Problem Oriented Policing Conference, I am pleased to submit this project for the Herman Goldstein Excellence in Problem Solving - Individual Award. Detective John Rivera initiated this project in an effort to combat problems associated with the theft of pallets used by various stores to warehouse and transport merchandise. This unique problem was the underlying reason for several serious assaults in San Diego. Some of the thefts numbered into the thousands. Detective Rivera created a partnership in the business community to address the problem.

As a result, his project reduced the incidence of pallet thefts and the associated acts of violence. Should additional questions arise regarding this project, feel free to contact Sgt. Jeff Dean at (619) 531-2234. Thanks for coordinating this award program and I look forward to seeing you at this year's conference.

Sincerely,

Jerry Sanders
Chief of Police



DIVERSITY
BRINGS US ALL TOGETHER

SAN DIEGO POLICE DEPARTMENT

Nomination for the Herman Goldstein Excellence in

Problem Solving

Submitted By: Detective John RIVERA, ID #2617

Summary of the Pallet Project

San Diego Police Department
1401 Broadway
San Diego, CA 92101

Detective John Rivera, ID #2617
San Diego Police Department
Central Investigations

The City of San Diego is located in the extreme southwest corner of California bordering Mexico. The nearest town along Mexico is Tijuana. Both cities have approximately over one million citizens residing in their respective areas. From time to time there are crimes being committed ranging from homicide to petty theft.

Fortunately, the City of San Diego has a police department that is committed to a problem solving partnership with communities, government agencies, private groups and individuals.

San Diego Community Policing is not just another program. It is a comprehensive approach to building a long term partnership with the community. Problem solving is the key strategy. The police department recognizes the need for close relationships between police and the community to accomplish this goal.

Community policing is here to stay in San Diego. New mission, vision, and value statements have been developed to reflect the new philosophy . Increasing numbers of officers and community members are practicing neighborhood policing and problem solving. The crime rate continues to go down and the residents often voice their satisfaction with not only the police department but with the quality of life in San Diego.

In 1993, Chief Jerry Sanders began a project to completely restructure the San Diego Police Department with an emphasis on neighborhood policing and problem solving. City wide beat

boundaries were altered to conform to the citizens images of their neighborhoods. Additional officers were hired and time saving new technological advantages were created. The restructuring was completed in May of 1996. Today literally dozens of resources have been organized and are now available to problem solving police officers. But the most important resource is the mind set. A problem solving attitude is at the core of every successful officer in the San Diego Police Department.

Since the restructuring, every police officer from the Chief of Police to the Recruit in the Academy has received special training in Problem Oriented Policing. Every service area has a manager that monitors every P.O.P. Project and ensures it's successfulness.

Driven by this philosophy, I identified the Pallet Project as a significant public safety problem in the City and began to gather all pertinent data. In March, 1995, I started a problem solving project for the pallet situation.

Through personal observations and from recorded crime cases, it was obvious that the City had a public safety issue in my service area. I decided that the goal of this project would eliminate the public safety issue and return the area to a safer quality of life.

In September, 1994, I was asked to assist another Central Investigation Detective in recovering stolen pallets that were discovered at a pallet buyer's place of business. The warehouse manager of Coca-Cola reported that he saw several hundred of the company's pallets from the street.

After a follow-up investigation, I discovered that the owner had a legitimate business license but our Vice Office, Code Compliance Officers were receiving inquiries about the company receiving and buying pallets stolen from other companies. We went to the company and contacted the owner.

The owner told me that he had a verbal contract through a broker with Pepsi to repair their broken pallets. He said he received two (2) truck loads, a total of 1800 pallets last week to repair. The owner said forty percent of the pallets that he received were Coca-Cola pallets. He said a large number of Coca-Cola pallets were brought in by another company. He said the rest of the pallets were brought in from the streets. The owner said he buys the pallets from anybody who brings them to him. He said he pays between fifty cents to one dollar seventy five per 30 x 30 pallet. The ones used for the bottling companies up to three seventy five for the larger pallets. During the investigation, I developed information that several other pallet yards were in the immediate area and also had stolen property.

Based on the information, Code Compliance Officers found three locations. They were all issued Notice of Violations and they agreed to return the pallets to Coca-Cola.

Arrangements were made to return the stolen pallets. Over a two day period, Coca-Cola picked up twenty four hundred pallets from four yards with an estimated value of fourteen thousand dollars.

Charges were not brought against the owner or the broker as the situation had been going on for years. The companies would inadvertently mix their pallets together and at times would not make any efforts to retrieve them. In essence, some yards had other company's pallets and vice versa. The owner and broker were advised of the potential criminal violations and code compliance regulations. In essence, I thought that the recovery of twenty four hundred pallets was an outstanding effort by the San Diego Police Department, but later on, I noticed that there were other crimes associated with pallet thefts.

On November 28, 1994, a transient was shot in a pallet yard as he tried to steal pallets.

On February 11, 1995, another transient was held against his will, tortured and beaten after he was caught trying to steal pallets from a pallet yard.

It was evident that transients in the Logan Heights and downtown areas were stealing and selling pallets to the pallet yards to obtain money for food or drink. This situation disturbed me. I decided to open up a P.O.P. Project and investigate the situation further. I felt that the high number of pallet thefts were associated with crimes of violence. The possibility of further violence was quite evident. I started this project by using the S.A.R.A. model. As you will later learn in this dissertation, the S.A.R.A. model was used on several occasions as the project became refined. After reviewing crime cases involving the number of pallet thefts in the City, it was quite evident that there were a few instances involving crimes of violence. My goal was to reduce or eliminate widespread pallet thefts and the violence that was associated with it.

After reviewing some of the crime reports of pallet thefts, it was apparent that pallets were taken from supermarkets and beverage companies. They were then sold to both legitimate and illegitimate pallet buyers.

In order for the buyer to protect his property, some buyers used extreme and violent means of deterrence to stop and apprehend pallet theft suspects.

I recognized the need to deter the violence. In doing so, I recommended to eliminate the high number of reported pallet thefts and get the business segment such as the supermarkets, the beverage companies and the legitimate and illegitimate pallet buyers involved in a combined effort toward that goal.

I SCANNING:

A high number of pallets thefts in the City are associated with the crimes of violence. (Shootings are involved.)

II ANALYSIS:

I requested a report on the numbers of pallet thefts in the City of San Diego from January to December of 1994. I discovered that many crime reports were taken during that period of time involving the theft of thousands of pallets.

In the south San Diego county area alone, there were seven pallet buyers and recycling centers. I also discovered that there were over twenty supermarkets, beverage and scaffolding companies in the San Diego area that used or stored pallets.

I was aware that the number of violent crimes were starting to surface as a result of these pallet thefts which included one man being shot inside a pallet buyers property, another man was actually caught inside the pallet man's property and falsely imprisoned and tortured. In another situation, an illegal pallet buyer was arrested for carrying a firearm by a convicted felon and shooting within the City limits.

In order to deter crimes of violence, the situation of pallet thefts had to be dealt with immediately.

III RESPONSE:

I decided that the police department had to educate the retailers and guide them on how to protect their property and to avoid future crimes of violence. The first step was to set up a P. A.A.C. meeting on March 9, 1995 in which Chief Sanders and many members of the Department and outside agencies participated. During the P.A.A.C. meeting the S.A.R.A. model was used.

A SCANNING

They said that the high number of pallet thefts in the City are associated with the crimes of violence such as shootings.

B In the ANALYSIS portion, many people contributed the following questions:

Where do these pallets go?

Who is selling them?

Who are stealing them?

Who are buying them?

What is the average value of the pallet/plank?

Are there clear markings on these pallets?

What procedures are certain companies using?

Do we know who the illegal pallet businesses are?

Can we develop a pallet owner's association?

Is it organized crime?

How can you identify stolen items?

How do you transport these items?

Can the buyers be trained to ID stolen pallets?

Is there actually legal follow through?

When are pallet/plank thefts most likely?

What type of pallets are being stolen?

What can a buyer do if a suspect/seller is dealing stolen property.

C As a **RESPONSE, P.A.A.C. recommended that the police department:**

1. Educate the owners of the problem.
2. Enforce licensing regulations.
3. Develop an unfair business muni code.
4. Establish a hot line for owners.
5. Stop and inspect trucks that are dropping off pallets at the pallet buyers businesses.
6. How do you lock and secure pallets?
7. Pallet owners must conform to licensing regulations to track down pallets.
8. Owners must have records.
9. Educate the owners on the use of deadly force laws.
10. Educate the owner's on carrying a concealed weapon laws.

I seriously considered all of the recommendations made at the P.A.A.C. meeting. On August 6, 1995, I invited all the retail, supermarket, beverage, recycling and pallet company representatives to a meeting held at the San Diego Police Department's Central Headquarters.

Essentially I wanted every representative in that particular room to get to know each other and to express any concerns that they had in reference to the thefts and to make recommendations that will

cease the thefts and diminish the crimes of violence.

Representatives from Von's, Pepsi-Cola, the leading pallet maker, Chep. U.S.A. and several pallet buyer/owners were on hand to give and share information. The police officers who attended this particular meeting were able to obtain a wealth of information on how the pallet was made and what sizes were available to the other businesses. Once the pallet was sold, it's used in various businesses such as warehouse distributing and retail supermarkets. Thousands of pallets are made each year and distributed throughout the country. When big companies buy these pallets, they are damaged on occasion and they are contracted for repair. During this process, sometimes pallets are lost or mistakenly given to other companies. But, each pallet is stenciled with a company name or logo.

I discovered that many of the businesses such as the supermarkets, do not have enough room to store all their pallets, so they leave them on their docks. Thus giving any thief an opportunity to take an unsecured pallet.

I concluded as a result of the meeting, networking was established. Also, several recommendations were used from the P.A.A.C. meeting. Even though several members of the business community did not attend the meeting, they were fully aware that I wanted a community partnership to deter violent crime in the business community.

A major part of this particular project was to educate the business community. They were brought together to learn more about each other.

As a result of this meeting, we suggested the following responses:

1. That Code Compliance enforce license regulations on legal and illegal businesses.
2. Recommended invoices of property being sold and identification of the sellers.
3. Do not buy stenciled pallets.
4. Signs letting the seller know that they do not buy stolen property.
5. Hire security guard or have a live-in property guard.
6. Get a dog.
7. Do not stack the pallets any higher than fence level.
8. Maintain the fence area.
9. Provide lighting.
10. Establish a hot line.
11. Keep records.
12. Keep receipts of pallets sold in volume for the retailer and distributors.
13. Contract with legitimate pallet repairers.
14. Secure your pallets.
15. Know your pallet buyers.
15. Stencil all pallets.
16. Check pallet buyer lots.
17. Disseminate information to other stores,
18. Create a liaison with buyers and police in other regions.
19. Police yourselves.

IV ASSESSMENT EVALUATION

An assessment of the entire project revealed astonishing results. Pallet thefts for the entire year of 1995 were only four and from 1996 January and February only reported three. This number dropped dramatically from the thousands that were stolen in 1994.

Code Compliance Officers wrote three citations to pallet buyers. One illegal pallet buyer was closed and the most important accomplishment of the entire project was that crimes of violence decreased to zero.

These reports indicated an obvious success in the problem solving model. I recommended that there be bi-annual meetings with police, the retailers, distributors and the buyers so that each one can communicate, network and continue to effectively deter crime. I also recommended that the pallet buyers continue to comply with code licensing regulations. As I conclude my P.O.P Project, I am able to look back and take great pleasure in what was accomplished. The concept of problem solving is real and proven to be a valuable tool. This project could not have been accomplished without the cooperation and support of the business community who devoted their time and effort to assist the San Diego Police Department in meeting our goal.

**CITY OF SAN DIEGO
MEMORANDUM**

FILE: 223
DATE: April 1, 1996
TO: John Rivera/Central
FROM: Mike Frattali/Crime Analysis Unit
SUBJECT: Pallet Theft

Incidents of reported pallet theft, City of San Diego:

Total 1995	4
January 1996	1
February 1996	2

Locations of Pallet Theft reports:

3240 Market St	Familian (2 incidents)
6555 Mission Rd	Vons
6212 CteDel	Republic
1779 Main	Atlas
526 J St	Premier Produce
2111 E Vista	Country

Code compliance cites for Patty Margetts, for 1995: 3