

North Tryon Street Corridor Commercial Burglaries  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department  
Charlie Three District

Submitted for Herman Goldstein Problem Solving Award  
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## **North Tryon Street Corridor Commercial Burglaries Project Summary**

This problem-solving project was initiated by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's Charlie Three District in response to a high number of commercial burglaries along the 3.3 mile North Tryon Street corridor. The project centered on prevention; its central focus was a concentrated use of the concepts of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). The overall goal of the project was to reduce not only the incidence of commercial burglaries in the target area but also the number of locations that suffered repeated incidents.

### **Scanning:**

- \*Officer observations of increased burglaries
- \*Discussions of crime trends with Police Chief
- \*Crime Alert Bulletins from Crime Analysis Unit

### **Analysis:**

- \*Use of GIS mapping to understand characteristics of the target area
- \*Identification of repeat victimization as major problem
- \*Identification and buy-in of stakeholders
- \*Determination that response must stress prevention as opposed to traditional enforcement techniques

### **Response:**

- \*CPTED Training for all Charlie Three officers
- \*CPTED surveys of all businesses in the target area and follow-up meetings with business owners to recommend security changes
- \* Increased efforts of third shift officers to conduct building checks and field interviews of suspicious persons

\*Rapid contacts with burglary victims

\* Enhancements to communications flow between response area officers, Bike Patrol Unit, and investigators

**Assessment:**

\*22.1% decrease in commercial burglaries in target area between 1998 and 1999. Trend continued into first three months of 2000 with 23.8% decrease in commercial burglaries over the same period in 1999.

\*15% reduction in locations that experienced repeat victimizations between 1998 and 1999

\*Only 8 of 20 locations that experienced repeat victimizations in 1998 did so again in 1999. No repeat locations in first quarter of 2000.

\*Increase in cases cleared by arrest from 5.2% of cases in 1998 to 10.8% in 1999

\*Project now in maintenance mode

## **Scanning**

One of the areas covered by the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department's Charlie Three District is a 3.3 mile portion of the North Tryon Street corridor, which is a major point of entry into the city. The corridor has a number of businesses including auto service centers, restaurants, convenience stores, laundries, business and professional offices, strip shopping malls, and gas stations. There is heavy vehicle and foot traffic in the area.

In January 1999, the Charlie Three District chain of command participated in a regular "report card" for the district conducted by the Chief Dennis Nowicki. One of the topics discussed was the 29.6% increase in commercial burglaries in the Charlie Three District and the 40% increase in these burglaries in the 3.3 mile North **Tryon** Street Corridor.

On February 8, 1999, the Charlie Three District received a Crime Alert Bulletin from the crime analyst assigned to that patrol district. The alert indicated that in December 1998 and January 1999, there had been fifteen reported breaking and entering cases reported in the 4400 to 7000 blocks of North Tryon Street. A more extensive analysis showed that there had been ninety-five commercial burglaries in this area.

Charlie Three Captain Rick Williams felt this was an unacceptable level of criminal activity and moved quickly to involve the officers working the area in a more in depth analysis of the problem. The analysis was to then lead to the development of a response that included long term problem solving techniques as well as a traditional enforcement response.

## **Analysis**

The first portion of the analysis phase involved the use of Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping for a crime hot spot analysis of the area. Some of the results of that analysis showed that:

- 20 businesses in the area experienced repeat victimizations during 1988.

- 7 businesses were burglarized two times

- 7 businesses were burglarized three times

- 6 businesses were burglarized four or more times with one location experiencing eight burglaries

Most of the offenses occurred between 6:00 p.m. and 6:00 a.m. but there was no particular pattern as to the day of the week. The problem was not isolated to any particular type of business; however, vehicle repair shops had the highest number of incidents. In a majority of the cases, entry was gained by the use of a blunt object or pry tool. In 35% of the cases, entry was through a door. Once entry was gained, it appeared the suspects quickly removed items and left before police arrived.

Officers then identified all of the stakeholders who needed to be a part of the solution to the problem. The most obvious stakeholders were the business owners in the North Tryon Street corridor who were losing inventory and experiencing a higher cost of conducting business. The officers wanted to insure that a loss of profits did not cause businesses to relocate, causing an economic decline in the area. The residents in the surrounding neighborhoods were clearly stakeholders as well. If the situation got bad enough that businesses started to relocate, the residents would be forced to travel to other areas of the city to meet their needs. Residents were also concerned that closed businesses would result in abandoned buildings that would create an overall deterioration of the neighborhood.

Charlie Three personnel were also stakeholders in the solution to this problem. The response area officers had to respond to more calls for service to investigate commercial burglaries. The investigators assigned to follow-up investigation would have to limit the amount of time spent on each case due to their increased caseloads. The likely consequence would be fewer cases cleared by arrest. Most important, if commercial burglaries stayed at their current rate, Charlie

Three officers faced a loss of confidence from the business owners. This was especially likely if the district devised a totally reactive and traditional response.

Captain Williams and Sergeant Doug Gallant, who had been tasked with developing a detailed response plan, felt that there should be dual goals for the response. While the most obvious goal was to reduce the overall incidence of commercial burglary along the North Tryon Street corridor, both Williams and Gallant felt that there should be considerable emphasis on reducing the number of businesses that experienced repeat victimizations. Capt. Williams emphasized that he was not open to a response built around the traditional solution of putting two plain-clothes officers in an unmarked car. This type of response is focused solely on arrests and does not really result in along-term reduction in the number of offenses. To be successful, the response needed to engage both the police officers and the business owners and be focused on the department's mission of preventing the next crime.

Sgt. Gallant began developing a plan that would educate and engage the response area officers, the bike patrol officers, the investigators tasked with follow-up on all the commercial burglaries, and the department's Crime Prevention Unit which has often been overlooked in problem solving efforts.

### **Response**

The assessment and response phases of this project actually overlapped to some extent. In order to respond to the large number of locations that had experienced repeat victimizations, it was imperative that Charlie Three officers determine what made those businesses so vulnerable to burglaries. To that end, Charlie Three began working closely with the Crime Prevention Unit that has been formally trained in the concept of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED). CPTED suggests that the form and arrangement of buildings and open spaces can either encourage or discourage crime. CPTED attempts to reduce crime and the fear of crime by

reducing opportunities for criminal activity and fostering positive social interaction among the users of a space. CPTED emphasizes prevention so it clearly complements the department's mission of preventing the next crime. The Crime Prevention Unit trained Charlie Three officers on the CPTED concept. Once the training was completed, a comprehensive CPTED assessment of all the businesses in the North Tryon Street corridor was initiated.

Charlie Three Bike Patrol Officers were tasked with conducting business security surveys at each of the businesses along the North Tryon Street corridor. Officers visited 57 businesses, conducting the surveys and educating the owners about the CPTED concept. Once the bike officers finished the initial survey, it was given to a third shift officer who was responsible for surveying the same property during night hours when the business was most vulnerable to crime. The third shift officer would add comments about lighting and overall conditions during night hours and then return the survey to the bike officer. The initial surveys were conducted at locations that had experienced repeat victimizations. Once those were completed, the officers concentrated on other North Tryon locations.

Once the security surveys were returned to a bike officer, a second meeting would be scheduled with the business owner to discuss the survey findings and begin recommending suggestions for change. Analysis had shown that a large number of the burglaries in this area were of the "smash and grab" type where the suspects break out a large window and steal those items that have been left in plain view and are readily available. The completed surveys revealed that most of the officers' recommendations were designed to impede this type of forced entry. The most common recommendations were improved interior and exterior lighting designs, ways to conceal store merchandise in front window areas, barricades to prevent "drive-in burglaries", and changes in landscaping.

The officers worked with business owners in developing realistic changes that could be implemented quickly and for a reasonable amount of money. One possible misconception

regarding OPTED is that the recommendations will be sophisticated and expensive. In most cases the recommendations are a common sense but often overlooked problem solving tool. Officers search for ways to make the recommendations easy and comparatively inexpensive for the business owner to implement.

Overall 31.5% of the businesses that were surveyed implemented at least some of the recommendations from the CPTED survey. The owner of the business that suffered eight burglaries in 1998 was told to conceal interior items from view overnight, install bar locks on back doors, and provide better lighting at night. These were simple and cost effective measures that reduced the opportunity for repeat victimization. This business had only one burglary in 1999. The offense occurred in March before the security improvements were completed.

A location that was burglarized six times in 1998 had only one burglary in 1999. This offense occurred in early January prior to the inception of the survey process. The owner of this business was told to install blinds to conceal computer equipment from view, purchase back door bar locks, and use landscape planters to prevent vehicles from being driven into the front of the business. Burglaries at this location ceased.

The CPTED component of this problem response was complemented by a variety of other efforts. The bike officers spent one or two days per week patrolling the North Tryon Street corridor. The officers worked second and fourth shift hours and concentrated on those areas where the largest numbers of offenses had occurred. They conducted thorough building checks and did field interviews with suspicious persons in the area.

The response area officers were mandated to make crime prevention and building security recommendation to the owner of any business where they responded to a burglary call. One of the most positive benefits of the project was the increased awareness of the officers and the ownership that they took in the burglary problem. Third shift officers, who frequently feel left out

of the problem-solving loop, increased their diligence in checking the overnight security of closed businesses. On several occasions they discovered unsecured doors. As a result of their efforts, several on scene arrests were made, increasing the overall number of commercial burglaries that were cleared by arrest from 5.2% in 1998 to 10.8% in 1999. The increase in arrests can be attributed to officers' increased familiarity with the problem locations as well as their knowledge of the methods that had been used to gain entry to each of the businesses. Officers also had access to a vehicle with a thermal imaging system that they used for surveillance and checks of wooded areas behind businesses.

Another component of the response to the commercial burglaries was to make quick contact with the business owner after a new burglary was discovered. Commercial burglaries usually occur in the evening hours and are not discovered until the first employees arrive to open the business the next morning. The offense occurs on third shift but the report is taken by a first shift officer. In far too many cases, the third shift officer might not be aware of the burglary until he received a bi-monthly report of suppressible offenses. In the target area for this project, all completed commercial burglary reports were copied and placed in front of the district roll call room so it could be discussed at roll call. The reports were a prompt for the bike officers to visit this location for a CPTED survey and to increase the awareness of the third shift officers so that they could take immediate steps to reduce the probability of revictimization.

One of the keys to the success of this project was insuring an orderly and timely communications flow between the Charlie Three officers who worked the North Tryon Street corridor, the Bike Patrol Unit and the Charlie Service Area Investigators. In addition to making all the burglary reports immediately available to the third shift officers, the investigators disseminated photographs and background information on all known suspects who frequented or lived in the North Tryon Street area. Investigators also gathered all of the videotapes of actual burglaries that had been recorded at area businesses. Those tapes were used at roll call training for Charlie Three officers to heighten their awareness of the problem and some of the techniques that were

used to gain entry to the buildings. Increased emphasis was placed on field contacts with suspicious persons seen in the target area. One officer was tasked with making copies of all the field interview cards that recorded these contacts and distributing them to all of the officers in the district. This helped them identify possible suspects that were regularly seen in the area.

The Charlie Three District hoped that by engaging all its officers, as well as the business owners in the area, the number of commercial burglaries. Their use of CPTED was perhaps the most concentrated application of the concept made by this department to date. The emphasis on increased communications between all of the units working on the problem can serve as a model for other patrol districts if they face a similar problem.

### **Assessment**

The Charlie Three District considers this problem-solving project to be a success. The number of commercial burglaries in the target area declined significantly during 1999.

#### **Commercial Burglaries on North Try on Street Corridor**

<b>1998</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>1999</b>	<b>74</b>

**Commercial burglaries in the target area declined 22.1% over the previous year. This trend has continued into the first three months of 2000. In the first three months of 2000, there were 16 commercial burglaries on the North Try on Street corridor as opposed to 21 cases in the same period of 1999. This represents a 23.8% decrease in 2000 over the same period in 1999.**

This project helped the Charlie Three District experience an overall decline in commercial burglaries of 29.6% over the previous year.

Perhaps more important than the overall decline in burglaries was the decrease in the number of locations that experienced repeat victimizations. The officers conducting the CPTED surveys concentrated their initial efforts on the locations that had experienced multiple burglaries in 1998 and found that those efforts paid off.

#### **Repeat Victimizations in 1998 and 1999**

**1998:**           **Seven locations burglarized 2 times**  
                      **Seven locations burglarized 3 times**  
                      **Six locations burglarized 4 or more times**

**One location experienced 8 commercial burglaries in 1998. There were a total of 20 locations that had repeat victimizations in 1998.**

**1999:**           **Eight locations were burglarized 2 times**  
                      **Four locations were burglarized 3 times**  
                      **Five locations were burglarized 4 or more times.**

**One location experienced five burglaries in 1999, the highest number for any one location in the target area. There were a total of 17 locations that experienced repeat victimizations in 1999, a 15% reduction over the repeat victimizations in 1998.**

**Most important, only 8 of the 20 locations that experienced repeat victimizations in 1998 did so again in 1999. Officers made a concerted effort to communicate rapidly with any location that experienced a repeat offense. In those instances where the business owner made the security improvements that were indicated by the CPTED survey, there were significant reductions in repeat victimizations. The business that experienced 8 burglaries in 1998 experienced only one in 1999. Another business that experienced six**

incidents in 1998 experienced only one in 1999. It occurred in early January, prior to the CPTED survey.

**For the first quarter of 2000, there were no locations that were victimized more than once. By the end of the first quarter of 1999, four locations had already suffered multiple incidents.**

The intensified efforts of the Charlie Three officers, especially the third shift officers who intensified their building checks and contacts with suspicious persons, resulted in a higher number of these commercial burglaries being cleared by arrest.

#### **Commercial Burglary Arrests on the North Try on Street Corridor**

<b>1998</b>	<b>5 arrests representing 5.2% of total cases</b>
<b>1999</b>	<b>8 arrests representing 10.8% of total cases</b>

While clearance rates for commercial burglary are traditionally low, the officers feel that even the modest increase in cases cleared by arrest is another benchmark of the success of their project.

At this point in time, the North Tryon Street Commercial Burglary Project is in maintenance mode. An analysis of the commercial burglaries in the target area is conducted every quarter. Any location that has been victimized more than once will be revisited by the officers for a OPTED review. If burglaries in the area continue to decline, the analysis will be scaled back to a semi-annual basis. If an increase in commercial burglaries occurs, the Charlie Three District will work with its crime analyst to determine the cause of the increase. Factors to be considered would include whether or not there are new businesses in the area that have not had the benefit of a CPTED survey, or whether there has been an increase in the target area's population. Another factor to be considered would be whether any area specific commercial burglary suspects have

been identified, including recent paroles of convicted storebreakers to the area. The problem solving process could be quickly reapplied if any upward spiral in commercial burglaries is detected. The Charlie Three District believes that this problem solving process could be applied to any area in the city that experiences a high rate of commercial burglaries with a large number of locations that have multiple offenses.

### **Agency and Officer Information**

- 1 This problem solving initiative was adopted by the Charlie Three Patrol District
  
2. All Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Officers receive specialized training in problem solving, both in recruit school and in-service training. The Charlie Three Officers received specialized training in the OPTED concept and its application as a part of the implementation of this project. The training was conducted by the department's Crime Prevention Unit
  
3. No additional incentives are given to officers who engage in problem solving. Problem solving is a basic unit of work for all Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police officers.
  
4. Charlie Three officers used some of the standard techniques that have been used to address significant increases in commercial burglaries in other areas. The concentrated application of CPTED and the internal communications enhancements are the work product of the Charlie Three District. The CPTED survey instrument was a part of their training.
  
5. The problem solving mode! worked well. The project relied heavily upon the application of CPTED principles so the success of the project was, to a large extent, dependant

upon the cooperation of the business owners in making the changes recommended by the officers.

6. The resources committed to this project were the Charlie Three Officers assigned to the response area that included the North Tryon Street business corridor. Other resources were the district's Bike Patrol officers who were redeployed to conduct the security surveys and the storebreaking investigators for the Charlie Service Area. All resources were within the parameters of the department's existing budget. One of the district sergeants devoted considerable time to devising the response plan and monitoring its progress.

7. Project Contact Person:

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- b. Police Captain
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**Study Area: North Tryon Street Corridor (Charlie 3 District)**

Time Frame: 1/1/1998 to 12/31/1998

Subject of Analysis: Commercial Burglaries

*(General) Place Type of Offense Location:*

Commercial Place 93  
Vehicle Storage  
Public Building

*(Detailed) Place Type of Offense Location:*

Other Business Location 28  
Other Retail Location 28  
Auto Parts/Auto Service Center 9  
Restaurant/Diner/Coffee Shop 6  
Convenience Store 4  
Laundry/Dry Cleaner 4  
Other Business Office 3  
Professional Office 3  
Shopping Mall 3  
Supermarket/Grocery 2  
Department Store  
Financial Institution  
Gas Station  
Other Parking Lot  
Public Utility Building

*Property Stolen Included:*

building exterior 58  
other miscellaneous 19  
household item 18  
cash 15  
tools/construction equipment 13  
clothing/furs 11  
TV/radio/stereo 11  
consumable goods: other 5  
office equipment 4  
computer equipment 4  
cameraloptical equipment 3  
building interior 2  
business/personal records 2  
firearms 2  
other vehicle 2  
auto parts  
musical instrument  
negotiable check  
non-negotiable check  
pets  
truck/bus  
bicycles 1  
jewelry

Study Area: North Tryon Street Corridor (Charlie 3 District)

Time Frame: 1/1/1998 to 12/31/1998

Subject of Analysis: Commercial Burglaries

Number of Incidents ° 95

*UCR Code Breakdown:*

Commercial Burglary 95

*Day of Week:*

Monday	5
Tuesday	6
Wednesday	2
Thursday	7
Friday	5
Saturday	5
Sunday	4
Unknown	61

*Time of Day:*

0000-0600	21
0600-1200	1
1200-1800	3
1800-0000	5
Unknown time	65

*Clearance Status:*

Arrest	5
Exceptional	2
Open	88

Study Area: **North Tryon Street Corridor (Charlie 3 District)**

Time Frame: 1/1/1999 to 12/31/1999

Subject of Analysis: Commercial Burglaries

Number of Incidents = 74

*UCR Code Breakdown:*

Commercial Burglary 74

*Day of Week:*

Monday	2
Tuesday	2
Wednesday	2
Thursday	6
Friday	5
Saturday	4
Sunday	9
Unknown	44

*Time of Day:*

0000-0600	17
0600-1200	2
1200-1800	2
1800-0000	9
Unknown time	44

*Clearance Status:*

Arrest	8
Open	66

**Study Area: North Tryon Street Corridor (Charlie 3 District)**

Time Frame: I/1/1999 to 12/31/1999

Subject of Analysis: Commercial Burglaries

*(General) Place Type of Offense Location:*

Commercial Place	68
Outside Location	4
Vehicle Storage	I
Public Building	I

*(Detailed) Place Type of Offense Location:*

Other Retail Location	20
Other Business Location	19
Auto Parts/Auto Service Center	11
Convenience Store	3
Laundry/Dry Cleaner	3
Other Business Office	3
Restaurant/Diner/Coffee Shop	3
Construction Site	2
Professional Office	2
Church	
Financial Institution	
Hotel/Motel	
Other Commercial Parking Structure	
Other Outside Location	
Private Property Surrounding Residence	
Real Estate/Insurance Office	
Shopping Mall	

*Property Stolen Included:*

building exterior  
TV/radio/stereo  
other miscellaneous  
household item  
cash  
tools/construction equipment  
computer equipment  
office equipment  
consumable goods: other  
jewelry  
collectible: other  
clothing/furs  
automotive items  
firearms  
landscaping  
auto parts  
other vehicle  
business/personal records  
building materials  
building interior  
truck/bus  
collectible: precious metals

**Study Area: North Tryon Street Corridor (Charlie 3 District)**

Time Frame: 1st Quarter 2000

Subject of Analysis: Commercial Burglaries

*(General) Place Type of Offense Location:*

Commercial Place 14  
Vehicle Storage  
Outside Location

*(Detailed) Place Type of Offense Location:*

Other Business Location §  
Other Retail Location 3  
Auto Parts/Auto Service Center 1  
Bar/Tavern/Nightclub 1  
Other Outside Location 1  
Other Parking Lot 1  
Restaurant Diner Coffee Shop 1

*Property Stolen Included:*

building exterior  
TV/radio/stereo  
tools/construction equipment  
household item  
cash  
other miscellaneous  
office equipment  
negotiable check  
camera/optical equipment  
automotive items

**Study Area:** North Tryon Street Corridor (Charlie 3 District)

**Time Frame:** 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2000

**Subject of Analysis:** Commercial Burglaries

Number of Incidents =16

*UCR Code Breakdown:*

Commercial Burglary 16

*Day of Week:*

Monday	1
Wednesday	2
Thursday	1
Friday	1
Sunday	2
Unknown	9

*Time of Day:*

0000-0600	4
<b>1800-0000</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Unknown time</b>	<b>10</b>

*Clearance Status:*

Open	16
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