

SafeZone*
**A Partnership of the Minneapolis Police Department
and Security Personnel in Downtown Minneapolis**

Summary

In 2003, the Minneapolis Police Department scanned its calls for service in the First Precinct and found the highest concentration of violent crimes and livability issues in the Downtown core. In reviewing those calls to disorderly behavior or crimes, we found that the vast majority occurred in public spaces. Most properties were patrolled by security personnel, but there was little interaction between the sworn police officers and security. Natural surveillance was minimized by the existence of the much-touted skyway system in Downtown, which shunted thousands of office workers and other law-abiding visitors from the streets, and a lack of presence by security personnel in the public spaces around large commercial buildings. Bus stops were particularly problematic, with drug dealing and aggressive panhandling a common sight to Downtown visitors. Chronic offenders appeared to have targeted this area for careers in nuisance crimes.

Analyzing the police reports and meeting regularly with key security personnel in the area, the MPD responded with the formation of SafeZone--a collaboration with security officers and commercial property managers intended to take back the public spaces through higher visibility of both uniformed security and MPD beat officers, through constant feedback and assessment of specific tactics and strategies, and by setting up a communications network with security which opened up information sharing between partners.

Building on the successful installation of public safety cameras in this area, the MPD enlisted the technological expertise of a local internet company to set up an independent web site where security and the MPD could share “best practices” as well as images and video from thousands more privately monitored cameras. Security reports were solicited to be submitted directly to the City Attorney via this “City WorkSite” in order to prosecute the “worst first.” Finally, a common radio channel was established to open up communication among the dozens of locations otherwise isolated from each other although all shared much the same types of incidents and chronic offenders.

Our assessment over the past three years is that the SafeZone efforts have been successful in reducing targeted violent crimes and auto crimes, increased arrests for livability crimes, and enhanced prosecution for chronic offenders. Our most significant achievement has been a large increase in participation by community members and individual business groups as well as security personnel and commercial property managers.

* Note: Due to the extensive collaboration and private sector partners work with the MPD to ensure accountability, the SafeZone collaborative has been incorporated as a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation. Safe + Zone = SafeZone (one word) to distinguish the collaboration from similar efforts across the country. See minneapolisafezone.org for more information.

Scanning

First Precinct commanders for years were aware of a general concern about livability crimes in the public spaces of the Downtown core, home to 150,000 office workers, entertainment venues capable of holding over 70,000 patrons, and licensed liquor establishments totaling a fire code occupancy level of over 30,000. A sense that disorder was tolerated by visitors, Downtown residents and businesses, and the MPD prevailed, in spite of years of positive developments on the main streets of Hennepin Avenue and the Nicollet Mall and increasing arrests of misdemeanants by First Precinct officers.

This problem was given top priority for long-term problem solving due to the concerns of elected officials and the media that Downtown was not safe and had been “given over to the bad elements.” The economic viability of a city is often reflected in its downtown, and the Minneapolis Police Department chose to establish a permanent partnership to address these perceptions.

The initial scanning considered livability crimes in the aggregate (primarily public drinking, trespassing, aggressive solicitation, and various crimes of disorderly conduct). It was felt that by addressing the conditions which created the opportunity for these crimes and behaviors, that the area would also see a decrease in the street-level violent crimes, robbery of persons in particular. Over other issues we chose livability crimes because they had multiple causes, often outside the direct control of the MPD, and therefore required a more comprehensive solution.

Surveys done by the neighborhood associations of Downtown were also considered, and these surveys affirmed the MPD's and business stakeholders' perceptions as to what most people considered the top crime-related problems Downtown.

Analysis

To analyze the problem and determine solutions, the MPD used police calls for service, CAPRS (“Computer-Aided Police Report System”) reports of crimes, walk-about with security personnel, and community meetings with various interest groups in the Downtown area. Annual surveys of the precinct’s comprehensive “Virtual Block Club” email list were summarized for planners.

From all sources, it was felt that the problem of livability crimes in particular was on the rise, which was difficult to contradict given the priority the commanders had given to addressing them, and the general increase over the years in the number of arrests for these crimes. One task force of the SafeZone dubbed this the “Hassle Factor” as most recognized the minor impact each individual livability crime had, but also emphasized how the cumulative effect of these crimes was the feeling of a constant “hassle” in doing business, working, or living Downtown.

In all community meetings, virtually every attendee had been victimized by aggressive solicitation, disturbed by public intoxication and offended indecent behavior:

- * Far more had witnessed these incidents than had seen, or been victims of, violent crimes.
- * Businesses could recount lost sales, patrons who’d let them know they wouldn’t visit again due to the ugly behavior on their street.
- * Large employers recounted tales of employees who felt unsafe working Downtown.

Prior to these meetings both internal and with the community, the main strategies involved increased presence of police officers and near-zero-tolerance arrests. It was found that this was far from adequate, and that to a large degree, the community itself held the keys to reducing the problem. Every participant saw the need for their own efforts to be stepped up and sometimes even changed.

Response

The MPD and the Security Collaborative (as the partnership with security was originally called) considered many responses:

- * Increased police presence
- * Community involvement in “eyes on the street” such as the “ambassador” programs seen as successful in other cities
- * Communicating concerns with the courts’ responses to low-level crimes and asking for more significant sentences
- * Adding a common radio channel to link security, commercial property managers, and the MPD in communicating on-going situations not requiring a law enforcement response
- * Establishing a common web link for the sharing of information, both for security personnel among each other and between the MPD and security
- * Soliciting video evidence in not only violent crimes but also for misdemeanors
- * Enlisting the community’s support through Community Impact Statements submitted to judges at sentencing
- * Ordinance changes more clearly defining aggressive solicitation and expanding the trespass period for chronic offenders
- * Reviewing the entire area to propose CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) changes to make the career criminals less comfortable Downtown

Except for the ambassador program, which is still under consideration, all of the above responses have been executed in varying degrees.

Brief examples:

- * The Radio Link was launched in 2005 with two dozen participating locations. In 2006 for the first time in history a bank robber who had victimized a skyway level bank was caught due to the use of the radio link and the rapid response of security in airing the

suspect description. Commercial properties in particular feel the Radio Link keeps them connected with the rest of the SafeZone in real time, and they no longer have to wait for a meeting to bring other security staff and property managers up to speed.

* The Crime Prevention Specialist and Community Attorney for the First Precinct put together an aggressive campaign to solicit community impact statements which used a simple mail merge sent to over 1,500 contacts in the precinct. Citizens can now submit a statement within 24 hours of an arrest of a chronic offender (defined as an offender with five or more arrests in a 12-month period). Security personnel worked with NorthWrite, the internet company which authored the City WorkSite, to put the impact statement on-line immediately following the security report so both could be submitted electronically, instantly, to the Community Attorney.

* On a case-by-case basis, CPTED evaluations of the most problematic locations have been done. One evaluation led to the multi-use complex involved establishing their own “mini-SafeZone” including regular meetings with the First Precinct. Most locations implemented some or most of the CPTED recommendations.

* City leaders allocated extra funds for increased police patrol in the SafeZone. These “beats” are also planned to be augmented by the use of a jacket by security officers which resembles the bike patrol jackets of MPD beat officers. This will lead to even higher visibility and also more perceived authority on the part of offenders when security patrols their properties.

In all cases, it was felt that each response would be most effective when formulated in partnerships with the various constituencies who could contribute the most to the solution. For example, initially only security personnel were enrolled in the web link, but soon it was clear that licensed liquor establishments had as much and sometimes more information on chronic offenders.

Our most important evaluation criteria were simply: How effective was the effort in reducing livability and violent crimes, increasing everyone's sense of safety, and increasing participation by community members? Most individual strategies did not require significant costs, but called for a large increase in commitment of time by our community partners. Our stated goals were:

- * **Increase** the arrests for targeted livability crimes and **reduce** violent crimes.
- * **Increase** participation in the SafeZone information sharing web link.
- * **Increase** participation in community prosecution, measured by the submission of Community Impact Statements and security reports on the web link.

The SafeZone was established during a period of declining tax revenues and, through attrition, available police officers. From 2006 through 2007, however, authorized strength has begun to rise again.

Regarding resources in the community, corporate sponsors included Target's funding of the public safety cameras, donated web services for the start up year of the City WorkSite, and individual members covering the expenses of the Radio Link. This allowed for swift implementation of our most complex strategies. Prior to these major

contributions, the MPD relied primarily on security, victims and witnesses at the scene of the crime to provide as much information as possible, and the victims were assumed to follow through with the prosecution if an arrest was made. With the technical support established, it became far easier for the MPD and the precinct prosecutor to follow up with reporting parties and victims.

The main difficulties in establishing plan for the SafeZone were mainly in convincing our partners how serious we were. For example, web accounts were set up in advance for security personnel to begin using the City WorkSite, yet often major events would take place without an on-scene security officer entering their report via the WorkSite.

Assessment

The MPD has seen positive results from the SafeZone partnership. Our bellwether crime, robbery of persons, has declined each year since the beginning of SafeZone.

Arrests for livability crimes have increased significantly, and anecdotal reports indicate some major locations have seen a decline in disorderly behaviors.

But the most important result has been that community participation has increased not only in the SafeZone but precinct-wide--each year we have added substantially more security officers to the WorkSite, including the addition of the bars and restaurants and the hotels. An unheard of phenomenon was the response to the First Precinct's requests for Community Impact Statements on chronic offenders. The Precinct set a goal of submitting 100 impact statements through the calendar year of 2006; over 1,200 were received. The Precinct's assigned Community Prosecutor has already collected over 1,000 statements through the middle of June, 2007. Security officers' reports on the WorkSite have increased annually since the WorkSite was launched.

Our evaluation primarily involved calls, crime reports, and arrest statistics. Our collaboration with county deputies and other law enforcement agencies has meant also that we can follow-through with other criminal justice partners such as probation officers.

Our partners have been proactive in identifying impediments to implementing our response plan. For example, the 100+ bars in the SafeZone noted early on in our

meetings that it would be good to know what parties had been trespassed from other establishments; their follow-through was to sign up for the WorkSite and begin to post their “86 lists” for all other bars to download.

Displacement was a paramount concern. Our data indicate that the problem was mostly reduced, and only slightly displaced. Primarily our stakeholders were concerned that narcotics activity and nuisance crimes would move one block away, from the entertainment district into the office tower area, or another block away into the residential districts. The only probable displacement we could measure was an increase in narcotics activity near a charity facility almost ten blocks from the SafeZone. This was determined from arrest data of chronic offenders who previously frequented the SafeZone but were later seen at this charity.

We intend to continue to assess the SafeZone response plan, to include both fine-tuning of existing strategies, and consideration of new strategies altogether. Due to the high visibility of the SafeZone, we have the advantage of other precincts giving their own analysis of replicated strategies in their parts of Minneapolis.

Agency and Officer Information:

** At what level of the police organization was this problem solving initiative adopted (e.g., the entire department, a few select officers, etc.)?*

The SafeZone involved primarily First Precinct commanders, crime prevention staff and prosecutors.

** Did officers or management receive any training in problem oriented policing and/or problem solving before this project began or during its execution?*

Several involved have had significant problem-solving training, apart from generally higher levels of education attained and more extensive training than most members of the department.

** Were additional incentives given to police officers who engaged in problem solving?*

Officers who exceed the usual expectations in law enforcement in each precinct are considered for Officer of the Month and Officer of the Year awards. Such above-and-beyond efforts can include long-term problem-solving.

** What resources and guidelines (manuals, past problem-solving examples, etc.) were used, if any, by police officers to help them manage this problem-solving initiative?*

Many involved have made it routine to consider the “best practices” in problem-solving by other law enforcement agencies and municipalities, including attendance at the POP Conferences and other criminal justice resource conferences.

** What issues/problems were identified with the problem oriented policing model or the problem-solving model?*

Several problems identified in the past were identified using the problem-oriented policing model, including the Award-Winning “Hawthorne Huddle” in 1999.

** What general resources (financial and/or personnel) were committed to this project, and of those resources, what went beyond the existing department budget?*

State, county and other government entities assisted with funding for extra beat officers. The Minneapolis City Attorney has assigned Community Attorneys in each precinct, and this has allowed for significant participation on the part of our Community Attorney in the SafeZone.

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