

Tilley Award Submission 2004

SMARTWATER PROJECT

**Lancashire Constabulary
Pennine Division**

**Endorsed by:
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Summary

Problem

The rural areas to the east of Burnley had experienced over fifty stone thefts committed late at night. The victims were identified as larger properties with garden walls, churches and back streets where old stone flags were plentiful. Offenders were difficult to determine due to the late night thefts and sporadic occurrences over a period of time. The reason for the thefts is the value of this type of stone.

Initiatives

The objectives of the project were to deter would be offenders by making any stone traceable by marking the stone slabs with Smartwater, a new technical advance available to the police. By using local press and radio to publicise what we intended to do and by erecting large signs on approaches to the villages we hoped to deter would be thieves from the area. All properties in the scheme would also display prominent window stickers clearly showing that the property was security marked. The cost to the police was some £100 for five bottles of Smartwater, the rest being purchased by local Parish Councils, churches and residents. By monitoring incident reports on a weekly basis, after marking was completed, we could determine whether or not the project was having any affect.

Principles

On completion of the project the rural community were more aware of the problem and were fully co-operative in helping achieve the objectives. The area became less attractive to would be offenders, resulting in a dramatic reduction in stone thefts. Thieves had been influenced by the remoteness of the area making it difficult to trace any thefts but since the high level of publicity surrounding the project this had been removed. It had been made clear to any would be thieves that stone would be traced if sold on to local stone yards and prosecutions would follow. Warning letters regarding accepting stone from dubious individuals were hand delivered to local stone yards and masons asking them to report anyone who they may suspect of offering them stolen stone.

Outcome

The main outcome of the project was a reduction in thefts from over fifty in 2002 to only 13 in 2003 in the three main villages on the eastern boundary of Burnley. The residents feel more secure regarding loss of stone from their garden walls, church yards and back streets which has also helped promote a much more positive feeling towards the police.

Description of project:

What is Smart water?

Smart water is a new technical solution to security marking of property and lends itself easily to the problem we faced. By using a pre-determined area on each stone or paving slab to be marked it would be easy to check any stolen property. We decided to mark stone slabs on the narrower edges so that they could be easily scanned for Smart water markings should any be found stacked up at any stone yards. Smart water works by dabbing a small amount in a pre determined area as above using the brush provided. Within the solution are a number of crystals, each one bearing the seven digit bar code applicable to each bottle used. These attach themselves to the surface of the stone. Using ultra violet light this marking can be seen. Scrapings can then be taken from any stolen stone, placed under a microscope and the attached bar code on each crystal identified. Each bottle's bar code is recorded on computer against the post code of the property marked making it possible not only to identify stolen stone but also to return it to it's rightful owner.

Scanning

There have been over 50 thefts of copingstones and stone flags in the village areas in and around Cliviger, Worsthorne, and Briercliffe in the 12 months up to the end of December 2002. The local residents in the three villages and farmers in the surrounding areas have confirmed this. I have confirmed with all three Parish Councils that they see it as a problem to which they would like more action in the future. On checking the Sleuth system for incidents the problem obviously needed addressing, the objective being to try and attain a reduction of 50% in the number of thefts in the next 12 month period.

Analysis

The location takes in a large rural area on the eastern side of Burnley. Some of the locations from which the thefts have arisen are remote from any large areas of habitation and have therefore been difficult to detect. The public do not always perceive someone apparently "working" on a wall as necessarily being involved in criminal activity. The victims have been farmers, churches, local councils and large residential properties. One farmer in Worsthorne village has already marked his stone with the new Smart water technology. The root cause of the problem is the ready market for stone of this kind for use on walls and paved areas of new houses/property. The stone would appear to be stolen to order as the instances of theft are usually close together and then no more for long periods. Since new stone is both expensive and not "old" looking there is a ready market for this type of theft.

Response

We offered to help the Parish Councils, property owners and farmers to Smartwater a number of properties and areas in and around the villages. Once done we publicised the fact that the villages are now Smartwatered with both a local poster campaign and a substantial press release. Local Stone yards were also leafleted and visited to make plain the fact that they will be investigated every time there is a future theft and action taken should they be found with any stolen stone. Our goal is to both reduce the number of thefts over the next 12 months and to deter thieves from operating in the area. Simon Evans (Crime Prevention Officer) supplied the bottles from stock. ALL the Worsthorne patch done was done by 1st March 2003. Briercliffe was completed by 17th March and Cliviger was done by the end of March. Simon Evans also obtained boards for myself to put up 12 warning signs at A2 size at all roads leading to the area. A press release was submitted via local press officer Paula Duxbury for inclusion in all the local press on 21st March 2003. All posters were placed at strategic points at all villages. Warning letters were hand delivered to all official and non official stone merchants and suppliers that are known.

Partners Responses

The Parish councils were asked to identify areas they would like to see Smart water used and let the police know how many kits they would like to purchase. Individual organisations and companies were also approached to ask to join the scheme. Church representatives were also contacted as were local farmers and residents. A considerable number of groups and individuals decided to join the scheme. This resulted in all local churches, most back streets, numerous farms and some individual properties being security marked.

Time Scale

The whole project took three months from inception to completion.

Resources

The police cost was minimal as the Parish Councils covered most of the cost along with individuals such as schools, churches, farmers etc. The police agreed to cover the cost of extra bottles of Smart water on a one to one basis. As soon as we had received payment it took about 6 hours work over a three week period to mark those properties and back street areas identified.

Objectives

The objectives of the project were to deter would be stone thieves from the rural area, reduce the number of thefts and increase confidence in the police from local residents who, previous to this initiative, felt that their concerns were being somewhat ignored. The feed back from some councillors and residents had been that although they perceived these thefts as being a serious concern this was not necessarily the case for ourselves.

Assessment

The number of thefts were reduced to thirteen in the period 1st January to 31st December 2003 compared to fifty-two in the preceding twelve months. This project had all the hallmarks of the POP approach to problem solving. A combined approach involving the police, community safety groups, local parish councils, religious groups and local residents has resulted in a significant crime reduction. The overall number of thefts, as determined under the “any other theft” criteria, in the three villages has remained the same over the twelve months up to the end of December 2003 compared to the previous twelve months. The number of stone thefts of this type has significantly decreased as shown in appendix1.

Picture below shows PCSO 7017 Dave Johnson with local county and parish councillor Philip Walsh, outside St. John’s Church, Worsthorne prior to marking the property.



Appendix 1

