



HOT PRODUCTS: UNDERSTANDING, ANTICIPATING AND REDUCING DEMAND FOR STOLEN GOODS

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Summary

This report focuses attention on the so-called 'hot products' that are most likely to be taken by thieves. A better understanding of which products are 'hot', and why, could help businesses protect themselves from theft and also the police in advising them how to do this. Earlier research into hot spots of crime and repeat victimisation has led new thinking in the field of crime reduction, and there is every reason to expect the same from research focusing on hot products. Some strategies will centre on police work; others relate to the wider field of action covered by the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme - in particular, on product design. This report is the first to review comprehensively what is known about hot products and what further research is needed to assist policy.

Main findings

- **Theft is concentrated upon relatively few products** These products share a number of common attributes in that they are generally concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable and disposable. While each of these elements may be important in explaining which products are stolen, how much they are stolen may depend critically on just one attribute - the ease of disposal.
- **For each kind of theft, specific items are chosen consistently by thieves** In residential burglaries, for example, thieves are most likely to pick jewellery, video players, cash, stereos and televisions. The British Crime Survey shows that for thefts involving personal possessions, cash is more frequently stolen than anything else - followed in order by vehicle parts (even where car stereos are excluded), clothing and tools.

- **Certain items are at risk of being shoplifted wherever they are sold** These include music cassettes, cigarettes, alcoholic drinks, and certain brands of fashion items. What these goods have in common is that they are enjoyable things to own and consume.
- **Which cars are most likely to be stolen depends on the purpose of the theft** An American study found, for example, that joyriders prefer sporty models. Thieves looking for cars to sell prefer expensive luxury models. Those seeking components to sell prefer models with easily-removable, good quality, radios. The cars most frequently stolen both here and in the USA are popular cars that are several years old. It appears that these are stolen to supply demand in the used car parts market.
- **Though more research is needed, relatively few hot products may account for a large proportion of thefts** For example, research in the USA found that theft insurance claims for new cars in 1993-95 were twenty times higher for models with the worst theft record than those with the best.

Points for action

This report is very much a first step on the road to providing valuable information that will help in tackling acquisitive crime using the Market Reduction Approach. The Home Office is currently funding two projects under the Crime Reduction Programme to look at the cost-effectiveness of reducing crime by tackling stolen goods markets.

For designers

- The report should help designers to anticipate which products under development are likely to become 'hot', and therefore which ones need enhanced crime resistance designed in.

For the police

- Analysis of crime patterns can help to identify new hot products. This information can be used to inform operational decision making and crime prevention advice.
- A further police role here is, for example, to help identify those products that are actually or potentially 'hot' and to feed information to designers on the products' vulnerability, and the MOs used by offenders to overcome existing crime resistance features.

For research

The Home Office Crime Reduction Programme is funding two projects to explore the potential benefits of raising awareness among designers, manufacturers and retailers of the need to avoid making and selling products likely to be easy and tempting targets for thieves.

It would also be helpful to develop our knowledge in the following areas:

- How to disrupt theft markets, especially those serving particular hot products.
- The amount of theft accounted for by hot products.
- To determine when particular products are most at risk and who will bear the cost of theft.
- To develop techniques to assist in anticipating technological developments and new technology that could result in new hot products - or in new ways of preventing their theft.

Other related PRC papers

CDP paper 66: The Nature and Extent of Heavy Goods Vehicle Theft.

CDP paper 69: Disrupting the Distribution of Stolen Electrical goods.

CDP paper 88: The Nature and extent of Light Commercial Vehicle theft.