

Home Office Police Research Group Briefing Note



TACKLING CAR CRIME: AN EVALUATION OF SOLD SECURE

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by Rick Brown and Nicola Billing

Sold Secure was a joint winner of the 1992 Home Office Car Crime Prevention Initiatives. The approach has since been extended and now combines measures designed to enhance vehicle security developed by Northumbria Police and Essex Police. It was launched on a national basis in 1994 with the support of the Association of Chief Police Officers. The principal aim of the scheme is to provide a list of recognised security devices (which have passed rigorous testing) to police forces and to an associated network of security device and motor vehicle dealers. This list can be used by the latter to recommend suitable vehicle security systems to customers.

This research was undertaken to help Sold Secure develop a reliable system for monitoring and evaluating their work. Particular attention was given to reviewing the quality of information collected by the organisation and to a detailed analysis of the trends arising from the data.

Main findings

Since its inception, Sold Secure has tested the effectiveness of 246 different types of security device designed to prevent motor vehicle theft. Of these, 86 (35%) met the requirements of the test procedure and have been included on a list of recognised security devices.

Of those products passing Sold Secure's testing, well over half (57%) were electronic immobilisers, whilst almost a quarter (24%) were mechanical devices.

Membership of the scheme

Membership operates at two levels. Firstly, police forces "sign up" to the scheme. Then, within these forces, security device dealers join the scheme. Sold Secure primarily identify the latter group as 'members'.

At the time of the research, 24 police forces had joined the scheme in England and Wales and a further 11 were in the process of joining. In addition to these, the Royal Ulster Constabulary operates the scheme and Scottish forces have shown interest in joining.

Within the affiliated police forces, 445 security device dealers had become members. On average, there were 19 of these members within each police force area, although there was considerable variation between areas, with the number of members ranging from 52 in one area (Essex) to 8 in two others (South Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire).

Sales of recognised products

In 1994, 4,113 vehicles were fitted with recognised security devices by dealer members of the Sold Secure scheme.

Over 60% of all devices fitted under the scheme were installed in just four police force areas - Northumbria, Greater Manchester, Avon and Somerset and Nottinghamshire.

The Mul-t-Lock was the single most frequently fitted device, accounting for over a fifth of all products installed by Sold Secure dealers.

Overall, electronic immobilisers were the most popular type of security, constituting two thirds of all devices fitted under the scheme.

Over half of the devices installed by Sold Secure members were fitted to vehicles manufactured by either Vauxhall or Ford. Indeed, the Vauxhall Astra, Vauxhall Cavalier and the Ford Fiesta were the three most popular models fitted with such products.

Effectiveness of Sold Secure

Every vehicle registered with Sold Secure was checked against police records to identify whether it had subsequently been reported stolen. Only 13 vehicles were found to have been stolen.

Of the 13 registered vehicles which were stolen, 8 had been fitted with mechanical devices, whilst the remaining 5 had been fitted with electronic immobilisers.

Vehicles fitted with Sold Secure recognised products were found to have a likely risk of theft of between 2.8 and 18.5 vehicles per 1,000 registered. These figures were below the national rate of 21 thefts per 1,000 vehicles registered. However, it was not possible to ascertain the degree to which the behaviour of people who bought such devices were different from the general population of vehicle owners.

Points for action

The report provides a number of recommendations for improving Sold Secure's process of monitoring and evaluation:

- **Improving the security device certificate.** Suggestions were made for increasing the

information collected on certificates which are issued to customers who buy recognised security devices. The Sold Secure address should be included, so that dealers are clear about where to return them to. The customer address should also be included so that Sold Secure are able to send information to purchasers of security devices, or conduct customer satisfaction surveys. The report also recommended providing the certificates free of charge, as this could increase the response rate.

- **Improving the security device database.** In order to reduce the number of data entry errors occurring on the Sold Secure database of devices sold, validation rules should be included and free text should be kept to a minimum. The data should also be cross-referenced with PNC data on a regular basis, so that Sold Secure's performance as a crime prevention initiative can be monitored.
- **Producing output from the database.** Effective monitoring requires regular analysis of the information available. Detailed management reports of the information on the security device database should therefore be produced on a regular basis.

In order to increase the availability of recognised devices, Sold Secure should also:

- seek to increase the number of police forces in the scheme; and
- increase the number of security device dealers who sell Sold Secure recognised products.

Other related PRG research papers

Crime Prevention Unit Paper 32: Tackling Car Crime: The Nature and Extent of the Problem.

Crime Prevention Unit Paper 33: Car Theft in England and Wales: The Home Office Car Theft Index

Crime Prevention Unit Paper 50: Vehicle Watch and Car Theft: An Evaluation