

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC CAR PARKS, CRIME AND CCTV: EVALUATION LESSONS FROM SAFER CITIES

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Summary

Car crime is a major and growing problem, of which up to 40% is associated with car parks.

This paper describes the results of an evaluation of a number of Safer Cities schemes in which CCTV has been installed in car parks in an effort to reduce car crime. It also draws out some more general lessons about methods of crime prevention evaluation.

Crime prevention evaluations need to attend to the *mechanism* (what it is about a crime prevention measure which may have the effect of reducing crime), the *context* (the conditions needed for the crime reducing mechanism to operate), and the *outcome-patterns* (the changes in crime which result) if useful lessons are to be learned from them.

A range of possible mechanisms associated with CCTV in car parks and the contextual conditions for their operation are presented, before reviewing the outcome patterns from the car parks included in the study. On the basis of information available, it was possible to draw some tentative conclusions concerning how CCTV can help reduce car crime in car parks.

Car parks in Bradford, Coventry, Hartlepool, Hull, Lewisham and Wolverhampton were visited. Their CCTV installations were described and available data on car crime analysed.

A general pattern of reduction in car crime following installation of CCTV was found, though there was some evidence that effectiveness faded over time. There was evidence of an enhanced effect when CCTV was introduced in association with other measures as part of a programme of preventive action.

Very few arrests had followed from installation and operation of CCTV. This was attributed to poor

picture quality, the relatively slow response time of the systems compared to the speed with which offences are committed and limited numbers of available security personnel available to respond.

There was no evidence of opposition from the public associated with installation of CCTV.

Points for action

- Car park operators can make an impact on car crime in car parks through the use of CCTV.
- The effectiveness of CCTV will probably be increased if other complementary measures are introduced alongside it.
- The pattern of crime in car parks needs to be carefully monitored and it would be unwise to expect that there can be once for all solutions. It is likely that repeated attention to the issue will be needed.
- Schemes need to be tailored to the particular circumstances of car parks. Useful evaluations in the future could focus on the precise patterns of outcome expected given the operation of particular mechanisms associated with CCTV. In order to do this arrangements for appropriate before and after measurements will need to be made well in advance of implementation.

Other related Crime Prevention Unit Papers:

- CPU Paper 34: Preventing Car Crime in Car Parks
- CPU Paper 32: Tackling Car Crime
- CPU Paper 35: Closed Circuit Television in Public Places