

# THE TOP TEN PERCENT: Targeting the Top Ten Percent of Pawners

## A SUCCESSFUL APPROACH TO REDUCING BURGLARIES

TUCSON POLICE DEPARTMENT, 2006

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### SUMMARY

- THE PROBLEM:** In 2003 and 2004, the Tucson Police Department (TPD) was ranked number one and two, respectively, in the nation for property crime rates in major metropolitan cities. The number of burglaries was a driving factor in these rankings. This motivated the department to thoroughly evaluate its current practices and seek out new, more effective approaches to reducing burglaries within the city.
- ANALYSIS:** This front-page problem was negatively influencing the city's economic development efforts. Further, while burglaries occurred throughout the city, several neighborhoods were being victimized by this crime on a disproportionate continual basis. The average number of burglaries from 2001 through 2004 was 6,492. Research from The National Institute of Justice report found that the top ten percent of burglars in any city commit at least 232 burglaries per year. Through analyzing how burglaries were investigated, interviewing employees and pawnshop managers, reviewing crime analysis practices, and conducting a literature review, it was found that the lack of an automated pawn system combined with the lack of a targeted approach to burglaries was a very ineffective approach towards a long-term sustainable reduction in burglaries.
- RESPONSE:** Pawnshops were required to hold items for 90 days and the backlog of pawn slip entries was 105 days on the average. After meetings with pawnshop owners, the TPD purchased an automated pawn slip entry program, and required that all pawnshops use the system. With timely information, the department was able to identify the top ten percent of pawners within the city and found the majority to have previous felonies. Using this information, the newly created Major Theft Offenders Unit prepared and distributed arrest packets to patrol officers well under the ninety-day property-hold requirement. By arresting the suspects, at worst, the TPD was able to obtain current photographs and fingerprints for future use. At best, and frequently, confessions were obtained and hundreds of burglaries were solved.
- ASSESSMENT:** In March through December of 2005, there were 421 felony arrests of pawners with prior felonies. These arrests resulted in an 18.6 percent decrease in burglaries from 2004 and a reduction of 1,362 burglaries from the previous four-year average of 6,492. The TPD continues to remove burglars from the community using this targeted approach.

## INTRODUCTION

Until 2005, the Tucson Police Department (TPD) operated a Central Investigations Division (CID). This division was composed of the Property Crimes and Violent Crimes sections. It became apparent however, that property crimes were not afforded adequate resources. Stretched management resources caused property crimes to fall second to violent crimes in terms of providing strategic directions and renewed focus on cases.

During the department's reorganization in 2005, the CID was divided into two divisions, Crimes Against Persons and Property Crimes. The investigative units of the Property Crimes Division include:

- Auto Theft
- Auto Theft Task Force
- Court Liaison
- Elder Abuse Task Force
- Fraud
- Burglary
- Major Theft Offenders
- Pawn
- Surveillance

Since its inception in 2005, the Property Crimes Division has practiced Problem Oriented Policing through various initiatives. "The Top Ten Percent," a Problem Oriented Policing initiative focuses on reducing burglaries within the city of Tucson. This initiative is dependent upon the electronic pawn reporting program, which tracks stolen items and the individuals who have pawned such items.

## SCANNING

When the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) data was released for the year 2003, Tucson ranked worst in the country for its property crime rate. The following year in 2004, it appeared that little improvement had been made when the UCR data indicated that Tucson had the second highest property crime rate in the country.

Burglary specifically was identified as a major city issue, because of its impact on both individual residents and the city's revenue sources. From a victim's perspective, burglary is perhaps the most troubling property crime because of the insecurity that occurs when one becomes aware that his or her home was entered by a complete stranger. The loss of feeling secure in one's home, accompanied by the loss of property, is often overwhelming. From the city's perspective, high burglary rates threatened to reduce revenues, as corporations were reluctant to consider Tucson as a relocation option.

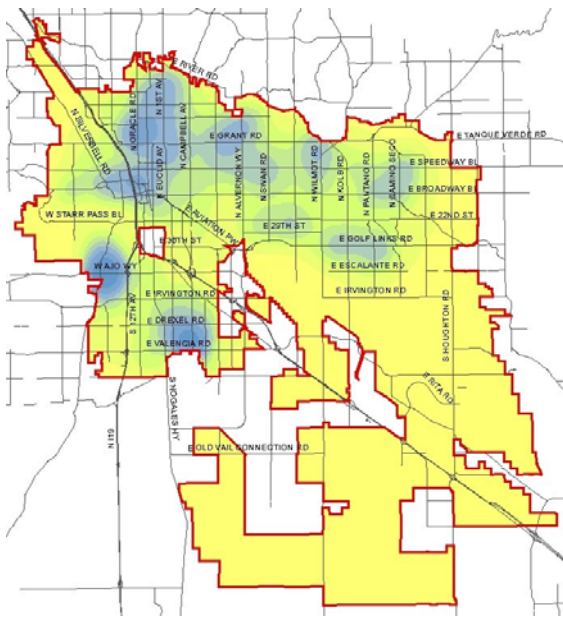
To combat the high property crime rates, the Property Crimes Division created the Property Crime Reduction Plan. This plan emphasized the need to reduce burglary within the city because doing so could significantly reduce the total property crimes. Information from the National Institute of Justice indicates that each burglar in the top ten percent of burglars commits more than 232 burglaries per year<sup>1</sup>. Focusing on arresting these individuals will reduce the burglary rate in a long-term sustainable manner.

The Property Crime Reduction Plan emphasized the need to target the top ten percent of burglary suspects operating in the city, due to the high volume of burglaries committed by these criminals. In addition, some neighborhoods had disproportionate burglary rates, which needed to be addressed so that the city's burglary rate could be effectively reduced. The following map depicts the geographic areas of Tucson with high rates of burglary.

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<sup>1</sup> Chaiken, J.M. *Varieties of Criminal Behavior*. U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice. 1982 (NCJ 87680): 44.

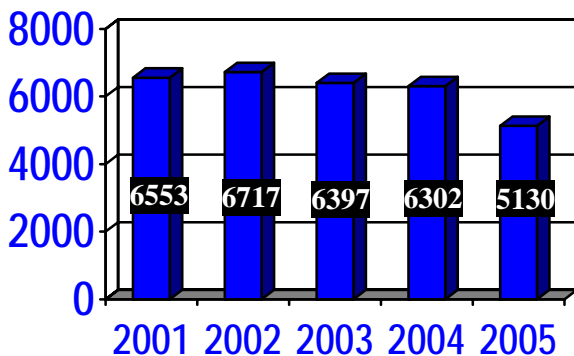
**2004 Tucson Burglary Hot Spots**



**ANALYSIS & RESPONSE**

Burglary had been an ongoing problem in Tucson for many years. The burglary rate in Tucson had remained relatively constant between the years 2000 and 2004, with no annual increase or decrease exceeding five percent. Regardless of the consistently moderate burglary rate, neither the community nor the department was satisfied. What became apparent was the need for a strategic burglary reduction plan.

**Burglary in Tucson 2001-2005**



It was not until early 2004 that the TPD came to establish the high correlation between property crimes and substance abuse. According to the department's data, 66 percent of the burglary

cases during the first half of 2004 were related to methamphetamine use. In addition, experience showed that burglaries were attributed to abuse of other controlled substances.

The data used to determine the extent of the burglary problem in Tucson included the TPD's UCR burglary statistics, pawn reporting data, crime mapping, and analysis.

As demonstrated on the Burglary Hot Spots Map, some neighborhoods are targeted by burglars at a far greater rate than others are. The causes of this disparity are outlined by the lieutenant of the property crimes division by noting that older homes were not built with the same emphasis towards crime prevention as new homes are. For example, the majority of older homes have wooden door jams compared to the steel door jams in new homes. Residences in neighborhoods with predominantly older homes are more likely to be targeted by burglars because of security features.

This problem was addressed through refocusing the mission of the Crime Prevention Unit to respond to areas experiencing high crime rates. This unit is responsible for the implementation of proven crime prevention techniques to target harden these locations.

Pawn reporting data indicated that a large volume of stolen goods was being pawned at local pawnshops. By law, pawnshops are required to fill out a pawn slip every time they purchase a piece of merchandise from a pawner. Following each transaction, the pawned item must remain in possession of the pawnshop for 90 days. This practice is essential for identifying both stolen property and the individuals selling stolen property.

The existing pawn data however contributed too few arrests and even fewer convictions because of the tremendous backlog of pawn data to be entered into the pawn database. While the law mandated that pawnshops hold every item for a minimum of 90 days, the average pawn slip was entered into records after 105 days. It took additional time to be able to analyze this data.

To overcome the challenges of the backlog problem presented by the lengthy process of manually entering the pawn data, the department invested \$45,000 to implement electronic pawn reporting. The electronic pawn reporting system utilized the Leads On-line software. With the availability of timely pawn data, investigators could more easily track ongoing criminal activity and the identities of active pawners.

Initially when the Property Crimes Division was created, the files of 107 active pawners were placed on the desk of a crime analyst. To focus on these major offenders, the department created the Major Theft Offenders Unit (MTOU). This unit works in cooperation with other property crime units. During just the first nine months of the creation of the MTOU, the unit was responsible for 138 felony arrests of felony pawners. In addition to the arrests made by the MTOU, the burglary unit made 421 arrests in 2005, an increase of 17 percent from the previous year.

With the information from the electronic pawn reporting, the MTOU was able to assemble arrest packets for distribution to the patrol divisions. The distribution of arrest packets often led to an arrest and confession of a major offender. In the MTOU's first nine months of operation, arrest packets led to 26 felony arrests by patrol officers. Even without a confession or prosecution, an arrest provided the department with an updated photograph and fingerprints of the offender. The electronic pawn data also reduced some of the redundancy that resulted from having multiple units searching for the same individuals.

Staffing shortages had also provided obstacles to apprehending active felony pawners. Due to the longstanding shortage of fingerprint processing capacity, many officers in the field were not taking a sufficient number of prints at property crime scenes. This changed when the Latent Print Unit doubled in size. This unit's increase in staffing, coupled with its expansion of the existing Automated Fingerprint Identification System, has significantly improved the TPD's fingerprint capacity.

## ASSESSMENT

The process of stepping back and looking at how burglaries were being investigated along with objectively analyzing all of the associated processes used to arrest burglars was invaluable. This provided for the creation of a strategic burglary reduction plan with clearly defined goals and objectives. The response plan's goal was to reduce burglaries by ten percent in 2005. The result was a reduction of 18.6 percent.

The Property Crimes Division captain and lieutenant developed and measured the criteria for the program's evaluation. The evaluation period began immediately after the Ten Percent Program was initiated in April of 2005. Hot spot maps were continuously reviewed along with pawn data analysis, and ultimately arrest statistics. The formal evaluation period was for eight months however, the program's effectiveness continues to be evaluated by the Property Crimes Division commanders.

There were several hurdles to cross to implement to Top Ten Percent Program. These were turned into objectives with clearly stated goals and were not viewed as problems. Having adequate funding, time, and fostering the change of practices in the department were challenging but successful. Once the TPD purchased the pawn software, along with using the requirement that the TPD could mandate how pawnshops reported their data, obtaining compliance from the pawnshops was accomplished.

Because there were immediate results observed upon the program's implementation, considering other systemic efforts was not necessary. The Property Crimes Division and more specifically, the Burglary Unit are continuously vigilant in seeking out methods to improve upon existing practices or to fine tune procedural issues. An example of this is that with experience and training crime analysts can become more experienced in various techniques to improve how data is analyzed



oriented project as part of their successful completion of training.

Engaging in problem solving is recognized in an employee's performance evaluation. Exceptional problem solving by an officer or squad can result in being nominated for one of the department's annual awards such as the Chief of Police Citation of Excellence or a Medal of Merit. It should be noted that how many burglars could be arrested evolved into a good-natured competition amongst the five patrol divisions.

The Property Crimes Division commanders went to patrol briefings to explain the Top Ten Percent Program directly to sergeants and their squads. In addition to answering questions, officers were provided with detailed arrest packets on each frequent pawnshop with felony priors.

Certainly, with additional resources, the Burglary Unit and the Major Theft Offenders Unit could make even more arrests however; this could be said of any unit within the department. The Top Ten Program model was and continues to be very successful.

In 2005, staffing to the Property Crimes Division increased by four officers and three detectives at a cost of \$660,260. Five of these positions were primarily dedicated to the Major Offenders Theft Unit and the Surveillance Squad, both of which greatly enhance the ability to arrest the city's top burglars. Also the TPD purchased the Leads On-Line software system for pawnshops to connect with for a cost of \$ 45,000.

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