

PREVENTING CRIMINAL DAMAGE TO SCHOOLS

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BACKGROUND

The estimated cost of repairing or replacing burnt and vandalised school buildings and their contents in New South Wales is \$16 million per annum. This is broken down into two categories, vandalism and theft accounting for approximately \$9 million, and arson, including the cost of repairing or replacing buildings and their contents, the remaining \$7 million. These figures are calculated as an annual average, varying in some instances as the result of a major fire, such as the recent destruction of Narooma High School on the South Coast at an estimated cost of \$6 million.

Table 1 shows statistics for fires in schools month by month from July 1985 to September 1987, indicating only the cost of damage to buildings, contents not being included in these figures.

TABLE 1

COSTS OF FIRES IN NSW SCHOOLS (BUILDINGS ONLY)

MONTH	1985/86		1986/87		1987/88	
	NO.	ESTIMATED COST \$	NO.	ESTIMATED COST \$	NO.	ESTIMATED COST \$
JULY	18	426,350	10	184,300	8	814,539
AUGUST	17	199,250	9	279,500	16	6,709,800
SEPTEMBER	10	90,900	9	149,000	8	210,500
OCTOBER	11	254,500	17	332,780		
NOVEMBER	12	181,350	14	2,271,300		
DECEMBER	6	524,000	7	72,300		
JANUARY	8	127,700	10	108,500		
FEBRUARY	13	96,400	4	200,000		
MARCH	17	384,300	5	41,000		
APRIL	14	119,950	3	33,000		
MAY	15	725,000	8	130,000		
JUNE	17	956,000	15	1,170,000		
TOTAL	158	4,085,700	111	4,971,680	32	7,734,839

The replacement of facilities destroyed by fire involves the normal processes of planning and construction, and thus, the time between the loss of a major facility, such as an Industrial Arts complex or an Administration block, and its permanent replacement, is often many weeks.

While these crimes against school property are obviously serious in terms of the economic cost to the community as a whole, they go far beyond this in terms of their cost to those directly involved in the school (students, staff, parents and friends of the school community), to whom the loss of personal property and facilities is often not nearly as devastating as the loss of morale and the feeling of futility which often follows such events.

TABLE 2

## BREACHES OF SECURITY IN NSW SCHOOLS, SEPTEMBER 1987

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>NO. OF INCIDENTS</u>
Simple Illegal Entry	50
Vandalism	17
Theft	5
Arson	4
Attempted Arson and Vandalism	2
Illegal Entry and Vandalism	57
Illegal Entry and Theft	94
Illegal Entry and Arson	1
Illegal Entry, Vandalism and Theft	82
Illegal Entry, Vandalism and Arson	1
Illegal Entry, Vandalism, Theft and Arson	2
Illegal Entry, Theft and Arson	0
Vandalism and Theft	0
Vandalism, Theft and Arson	0
Theft and Arson	0
TOTAL	315

Table 2 gives details of reported breaches of security for the State in September 1987, showing the category of the offence and giving the number of incidents of each category. Such tables are recorded for each month and, together, form a profile of property crime in schools over a twelve month period. The growth of such crime is apparent from Table 3 which details the number of breaches of security submitted by NSW School Principals from 1971/72 to 1986/87.

TABLE 3

## BREACHES OF SECURITY IN NSW SCHOOLS 1971-1987

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NO. OF REPORTS RECEIVED</u>
1971/72	1542
1972/73	1852
1973/74	1947
1974/75	1900
1975/76	2176
1976/77	2243
1977/78	2641
1978/79	2560
1979/80	3021
1980/81	3092
1981/82	3448
1982/83	3575
1983/84	3794
1984/85	3872
1985/86	4366
1986/87	4515

The NSW Department of Education is divided into ten Regions, divided between Metropolitan Sydney and country areas. The security problem is most serious in Metropolitan Sydney, particularly in the west and south west, and, to a lesser extent, the east. Population density and rapid growth areas afford a major contributing factors.

COMBATING SCHOOL PROPERTY CRIME

The Department of Education has adopted a range of strategies to combat the serious social problem of property crime against schools. In recognition of the need for improved physical security in schools, the State Government has undertaken to spend \$10 million per annum over a four year period to provide electronic surveillance, installation of non-urban local alarms, increased security patrols, improved physical security measures and support staffing.

When making the joint announcement with the Treasurer, the Minister for Education stated that the Department of Education had concentrated its security program on schools which were regarded as 'high risk'. These were schools in areas where there is a higher incidence of street crime and vandalism. However, the recent attacks on country schools at Broken Hill and West Wyalong have revealed that there is no 'low risk school'.

Electronic surveillance will not eliminate fires and vandalism. It will serve only to reduce the problem. Vandalism will cease only when the perpetrators cease to wish to destroy, or when community attitudes are such that the deterrent is stronger than the will to act.

This does not mean that there is no merit in pursuing a program of electronic surveillance. In fact, there is a wealth of evidence (particularly from Victoria and other States) to suggest that it is an effective means of reducing crime against property in schools. What is important, and what the State Government and the Department of Education both realise, is that electronic surveillance forms an Integral part of a wide-reaching program which incorporates a variety of approaches to the task of combating an element in society which causes stress, trauma and economic damage to the community.

Seventy one schools have been connected to the Department's electronic surveillance system. The 1987/88 Security Works Program provides for an additional 125 Secondary, and 125 Primary schools in the Sydney Metropolitan area to be connected to the system. In addition, burglar alarms will be installed in 100 'high risk' country schools. The Department's goal is to connect all schools with security problems to electronic surveillance as soon as practicable.

As a result of the electronic surveillance program, over 120 offenders have been apprehended. This figure includes children currently enrolled in schools, adolescents and professional or potential hardened criminals. The total security program has two main features. Firstly it is a deterrent, and, secondly, it is a means of early detection to prevent serious crime and property damage to school buildings and their contents.

The program also provides for the employment of security guards, including mobile patrols and static guards. A program which provides vacation patrols of schools has been operating for some time, and has proven to be successful. Special security patrols have been organised in areas where vandalism or arson has occurred, and police patrols have assisted in acting as a deterrent to possible perpetrators.

There are several ways in which the improvement of physical security in schools is being approached.

In terms of future and long-term provisions, the design of schools is being carefully investigated to allow 'built in' security measures, and the Schools Building Code incorporates a section for security. Not only is the inclusion of security

features in the Schools Building Code advantageous in that present schools can be physically secured more easily, as their design lends itself to this, but, with security an integral part of the school design, it is less evident as 'fortress mentality' for those who live and work in the school environs everyday.

In existing schools, the additions of heavier locks, grilles and bars on windows, the provision of secure stores and, in some cases, perimeter fencing, all assist in making schools more difficult targets.

On a less complicated level, but one which can be of great importance to the security of premises, schools are becoming increasingly conscious of the need to ensure that all precautions are taken, such as storing equipment and records securely at the end of each day, and being vigilant in the locking of doors and windows after school hours. Schools are well aware of such devices as limiting access to certain parts of the school at times when after hours activities are taking place.

Such security is important as a deterrent not only to adolescents, but also to professional burglars who are attracted by expensive specialist equipment readily available in many schools. Fire is sometimes used to camouflage the original crime.

Professional thieves are interested only in readily portable and saleable commodities. One approach in combating their interest in schools as the sources of such products, (which really goes beyond the province of the Department), is a need to curb the ready market in such places as hotels, where contact is made with normally 'honest' citizens, who see the chance for a bargain. A campaign which has been conducted over the past few years to alert people to the criminal responsibility of purchasing such goods needs continued reinforcement if the market, and therefore the thefts, are to be eliminated.

The Minister for Education has expressed support for a supplementary Arson Reward Scheme, paid from State Government funds, to cover schools and other public buildings. It is part of an initiative by the State Government, the Police Department and the Insurance Council of Australia and its aim is to encourage the community to provide information leading to the arrest and conviction of offenders. The scheme will be managed by the Police Department.

Those who work in schools are increasingly aware that they are no longer immune to property crime following the demise of a community ethic which held them apart from such damage through their connection with children and the positive feelings of community ownership. Ultimately, there must be the development

and fostering of an attitude that it is unacceptable to attack school property, an attitude which seems best developed in areas where communities regard school buildings as their own, rather than as belonging to the Government.

The Department recognises the importance of fostering such an attitude, and of encouraging security consciousness, not just in students and staff, but in community users of school premises, such as school Parents and Citizens Associations.

The highly successful Neighbourhood Watch Scheme, which has promoted co-operation between the community and the NSW Police Force, has been extended where possible to include schools. Aside from the benefits derived in terms of prevention or detection of crime, the scheme has done much to foster awareness of schools as belonging to, and being an integral part of, a community, rather than as 'a Government building'<sup>1</sup> which ceases to be of concern or interest after school hours.

The concept of the Community School Watch Scheme is the voluntary protection of school property and buildings on a regular roster basis by members of a Parents and Citizens Association. The concept is applicable in circumstances where parents feel that there is a need for security afforded by parental involvement. The concept is modelled on several successful systems implemented at schools. The following is an example of such a scheme.

School Security Watch Program  
- John Warby Public School

John Warby Public School is a large first class primary school located in a vast Housing Commission development at Airds, Campbelltown, in the Department of Education's Metropolitan South West Region. The school has had a history of regular vandalism and serious breaches of security since its establishment in 1976. The Principal reports that 'clean ups' and makeshift repairs had become a regular feature of Monday mornings and school days immediately following vacation periods. During the four school weeks preceding 27 February, sixty seven windows were broken and on the evening of 27 February the school sustained arson related damage totalling \$100,000.

Following the fire, the Principal and parents decided to carry out regular evening patrols of the school premises to prevent any further such attacks on the school. The group of interested parents

grew in number and eventually their role was formalised under the auspices of the P & C Association as a school voluntary watch program.

The Watch Program involves fourteen fathers who patrol the school premises on a rostered basis each evening and all day Saturday and Sunday. The group is equipped with walkie talkie radios and is linked to a citizens' emergency radio service known as CREST. This enables them to communicate promptly with police and other emergency services as required.

Since the establishment of the voluntary watch program, the incidence of vandalism and breaches of security sustained by the school has been reduced to just one broken window and minor damage to two external security lights since February.

The Principal, parents and staff are delighted with these outstanding results. Staff morale and school/community relations have been strengthened enormously, and the school's vandalism bill almost totally eliminated.

The Director, Metropolitan South West Region, is presently promoting watch programs in other affected schools throughout the Region and is hopeful of achieving similar positive results.

It is important for the scheme that a high profile is maintained, that details of the roster are publicised amongst students and the local media, that nearby citizens are informed, and that locals in the vicinity are encouraged to report suspicious movements.

Ministerial approval is required to establish the scheme in a school, and there are a number of criteria which must be met before such approval will be given. The Department of Education insists that:

- i) there should be passive surveillance only;
- ii) volunteer patrols should not accost people;
- iii) volunteer patrols should report any detections to the police, who will take the necessary action;
- iv) the school should advertise that volunteer patrols are operating;

- v) volunteers must not place themselves in a 'risk' situation;
- vi) the Department of Education will not be involved in arranging or meeting premium costs for insurance cover.

A small number of schools have adopted this scheme successfully, however, there is some concern expressed by members of the community anxious to avoid fostering vigilante style behaviour, or worried at the implications of the level of risk to which members of such patrols may be subjected, simply by choosing to be part of the roster. Such concerns have been considered by the Department, and it is felt that the regulations set out should minimise any possibility of Community School Watch groups providing anything but a positive contribution to monitoring, particularly the physical security of school premises through observation of any suspicious movements. Much of the success of the scheme lies in the deterrent effect of the publicity surrounding it.

#### JOINT AGENCY PREVENTIVE ACTION

Generally the Department is seeking to promote co-operation between the Police, the community, the fire authorities and the Public Works Department to devise measures to minimise the incidence of school vandalism and arson. Importantly, the Department seeks and encourages the assistance of school staff, students, parents and the community in alerting the authorities whenever there is a likelihood of a school being vandalised. To promote such co-operation requires education and the building of trust and good communication between all those Involved.

A pilot project entitled, School - Community Educational Awareness Security Program is to operate in 1988, at a cost of \$130,000. It is a response to the view that the Department of Education is entirely responsible for combating the serious social problem of crime in schools, and will operate in the Metropolitan South West Region (an area incorporating a number of 'high risk' suburbs of Sydney), under the authority and auspices of the Schools Directorate, and overseen by a specially appointed committee. The committee will include representatives from the Department of Education (Schools Directorate, Properties Directorate and the Region) and the Police Department.

The Police report that the proposal has been very well received by the Counter Arson Committee, and that there is enthusiasm for a project with the aim of trialling a variety of methods to offset arson, vandalism and illegal entry in a high security risk region, in order to develop an operational model which could then be applied in other Regions of the State as required.



In a trial project such as this, selection of staff is important, as the success of the project will rest principally on the quality of the personnel. The list of qualities needed by Education personnel is extensive, and it is worthwhile examining this, as it sheds light on the human resources necessary to ensure that prevention of crime against property in schools goes beyond providing physical barriers to would-be perpetrators, and towards instilling a sense of community responsibility.

Officers working in the Program will require: initiative and drive; expertise in inter-personal communication skills with both children and adults; the capacity for self-direction; ability to design and implement teaching modules; tact and diplomacy in work with police units; regional and school staffs and the community (at times in sensitive circumstances following arson or vandalism attacks); the ability to respond to variable working conditions such as evening attendance at community meetings; and possibly some weekend commitments, and experience in counselling.

#### RESEARCH INTO SCHOOL PROPERTY CRIME

It is important in the research of crime in schools to gather, analyse and interpret statistics. There are two types of vandalism which occur in schools:

1. vandalism from within the school (often occurring during school hours, as well as after hours), and
2. vandalism from without (usually occurring after school hours, and frequently by perpetrators unconnected to that particular school).

For the first there is a need to determine the cause of this and the motive behind the actions, and then look to possible solutions and means of preventing these occurrences. For the second, the methods developed by the Education Department are aimed at addressing the problem. In both of these areas there is a need to determine where responsibility lies, but, rather than simply apportioning blame, to then address the problem through education, as well as by providing physical security.

In an attempt to address these questions, a research study is to be conducted by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research into school vandalism and arson. The unrestricted study is to include investigation into the following areas:

- a) why school students, alone of all the clients of public facilities, feel compelled to burn and wreck those facilities;

- b) what pleasure or fulfilment such arsonists derive from their actions;
- c) what is their motivation;
- d) to what extent is it suppressed revenge against an incident at school or general alienation at the school;
- e) to what extent media publicity breeds the idea in the minds of some children that vandalism is a way to achieve notoriety or some other need?

In regard to this last point, the media is an important tool in the fight against property crime in schools, yet there is the risk that it can, by providing the wrong impression of such crime, promote in certain people the concept of achieving notoriety through 'newsworthy'<sup>1</sup> events. In an article in the Sydney Morning Herald on 14 August 1987, discussing the need for improved security in NSW schools, it was stated that:

The Department is right when it points to sensationalist reports in the media as the catalyst often for a spate of arson attempts.

In fact, the journalist who wrote the article has noted a salient point - that is is 'sensationalist reports' that may offer encouragement to potential vandals and arsonists. Responsible journalism can do much to further the Department's cause, particularly in the area of alerting the community as a whole to the extent of the problem.

#### A PREVENTIVE MEDIA CAMPAIGN

It was with this last point in mind that the Department arranged a radio campaign to draw attention to the problem.

The campaign was aimed at mature people with the intent of developing a type of unstructured neighbourhood watch on school buildings. The message of the campaign was that schools are community buildings paid for by taxpayers, and as such, they should be protected by the community. People who live near schools were urged to report to Police any suspicious activity in or near school buildings. It was believed that such action might prevent damage to schools - damage which must be paid for by the taxpayers.

The campaign was targeted towards people living in the western and south western parts of the Sydney Metropolitan area\* Four commercial radio stations were chosen to broadcast 30 second

commercials for 26 weeks, beginning on 9 June 1987. The following is a sample script from the campaign comprising sound effects (SFX) and an announcer (ANNR):

MUSIC: 'Boys and girls come out to play'.

SFX: (Vandals smashing a classroom)

ANNR: Every once in a while the gang gets together to play at the school.

SFX: (Glass being broken)

ANNR: They have a smashing time.

SFX: (Hear kids laughing and generally being loathsome)

ANNR: It's great fun for them and they get their kicks for free. But as a taxpayer it costs you sixteen million dollars a year.

SFX: (Hear flames)

ANNR: The money they waste through their vandalism could build two new high schools or five new primary schools a year.

SFX: (More smashing)

ANNR: If you live near a school ... be a spoil sport ... the next time the gang gets together and wrecks a school ... call the Police ... quick as you can.

This is an urgent SOS, Save our Schools...

SFX: (Fade out effects)

ANNR: ... from vandals.

An evaluation of the success of this campaign is taking place, but present indications are that it has served to heighten community awareness of the problems of arson and vandalism in schools.

Throughout the period in which arson and vandalism in schools has grown to be a major problem, the mass media has focused a great deal of attention on the matter, and several general comments can be made concerning the media and reporting of crime in schools:

Firstly, there is frequently a tendency to focus the report towards lack of Departmental action in addressing the problem, and to apportion blame to deficiencies in the education system generally. In terms of community awareness, reports which focus on the loss felt by other students, and the disruption caused to their education over an extended period of time have the desired effect of 'humanising' the event away from the destruction of a Government ('theirs') rather than a Community ('ours') facility.

Secondly, unless 'sensational', reports of the apprehension of offenders are often less prominent than reports of the destruction. While the cost of the damage in dollars is reported, familiarity with the event (no media fault here) makes it easy for people to dismiss the amount of taxpayers' money that vandals and arsonists (usually children and adolescents) are squandering.

Thirdly, while using all possible means of heightening community awareness of the problems in our schools, with a view to encouraging participation in their prevention, communities are only really likely to feel a sense of attachment or interest in schools if they know of the good things that are happening in them, both from within the school and from Regional and Departmental initiatives. Positive reporting of activities in schools goes a long way to establishing them as objects of value in the community.

In this sense, the Department's encouragement of joint school/community facilities goes a long way to both fostering a sense of community commitment and to countering the likelihood of vulnerability to come. As the press article quoted above goes on to say:

It (the Department) has a valid point when it claims that schools are peculiarly vulnerable to vandals. Unlike other major public institutions, such as hospitals, they are empty for long periods, and they are easily broken into. For disgruntled students or troublemakers, schools are an obvious target as the front line of an authority they hate.

(Sydney Morning Herald, 14 August 1987)

#### CONCLUSION

The Department's encouragement of community use of schools is a further means of Improving security in schools. The Department is also aware that there are curriculum implications in devising means by which arson and vandalism can be prevented in schools.

The importance of maintaining the idea that schools are warm, caring places lies also in the teaching of self-discipline and values in children. Those involved in education place great store in the provision and maintenance of a secure environment for their students - secure in both the physical and emotional sense, in as far as the school has the power to provide this. Parents, quite reasonably, believe and expect that this security is provided, and expect that their children will be educated within a setting which is free from violence or the threat of violence.

Many of these people would probably not consider that the vandalism and arson which occurs in schools is a violation of this expectation, since the aftermath of property crime is usually fiscal or emotional rather than actually physically harmful to the child, yet vandalism and arson are surely acts of violence. Children need to be made more aware of this fact, as well as of the long-term consequences of such action. Peer support, or lack thereof, is often the greatest determining factor in student action. Of course, it would be simplistic to believe that all possible offenders, and particularly those for whom alienation is the cause of their aggression, are going to be deterred because they know that others disapprove, however, if it was seen before damage was done that the overwhelming feeling among their peers was to condemn such action, then many would probably reconsider.

Security should also be seen as part of the learning process of responsibility. There are excellent opportunities to promote these attitudes within such areas as peer support programs and classroom discussion. The Department is actively engaged in promoting research and action which can bring about education in this matter through curriculum planning.

This discussion covers a number of initiatives in which the State Government and the Department of Education are engaged in the formulation of an approach to prevent criminal damage in schools. The individual components range from physical security (locks, grilles, etc), detection and warning devices (electronic surveillance system, alarms), human involvement in physical security (guards, Community and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes), to media campaigns and research programs. There is, coupled to all these measures, the underlying approach to making the whole community, both inside and outside schools, aware of what is happening and of the need to prevent the promulgation of the idea that vandalism and arson are unfortunate problems of society that have to be lived with until 'the Government' does something about them.

There is evidence to show that the approaches taken to combat property crime in NSW schools are working, with a drop in the number of fires in the July-October figure of 1987 (35 fires) compared with the same period in 1986 (45 fires).

The main thrust of the security program in schools is seen to be the connection of schools to electronic surveillance, and there is evidence to show that the measures being taken are achieving good results. Electronic surveillance, however, has its limitations and, as observers of crime will readily note, as one opening is closed another appears.

It is not the intention of the Department to continue to strengthen and fortify schools, as this would have most serious consequences, not the least on the morale of school communities. The alternative to fortification is the development of positive attitudes in the community, and the Department is pursuing a number of programs designed to prevent property crime in schools at the source, by teaching community awareness and fostering a sense of pride in ownership in schools.

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#### DISCUSSION

Q: You pointed out that you were keen to encourage community involvement to watch over schools. Couldn't the money being spent on electronics, apprehension and prosecution be better spent to that end?

Allsopp: It is the Government that decides what action to take. Electronics are seen as a valuable deterrent and a way of detecting offenders in the act and reducing the damage they may cause.

Q: Catholic schools seem to suffer less vandalism. Why do you think that is so?

Allsopp: I think because those schools select their own students and often have fairly strict rules about behaviour. But, in addition, there is usually a church and often teachers' accommodation nearby.

Q: In days gone by, schools always had fences around them and the problem did not seem so great. Should we try that again?

Allsopp: We do have fences and electronics in some schools but that is generally seen as a last resort. We would have to seek the views of the local community about a school fence because that could, for instance, cause property values to fall.

Q: Do other educational institutions, for example, TAFE colleges, also suffer in what are your worst areas?

Allsopp: I'm not sure.

Q: Why has it taken so long to react to the problem and spend the big money that's necessary?

Allsopp: As the costs of repairing damage or replacing facilities increases, the cost of preventive action becomes relatively less.