

## THE CHALLENGING UPKEEP OF A PRODUCE MARKET MIAMI POLICE DEPARTMENT, FLORIDA, 2011

### THE FOUR ELEMENTS INVOLVED: Scanning (Problem), Analysis, Response and Assessment:

#### SCANNING (Problem):

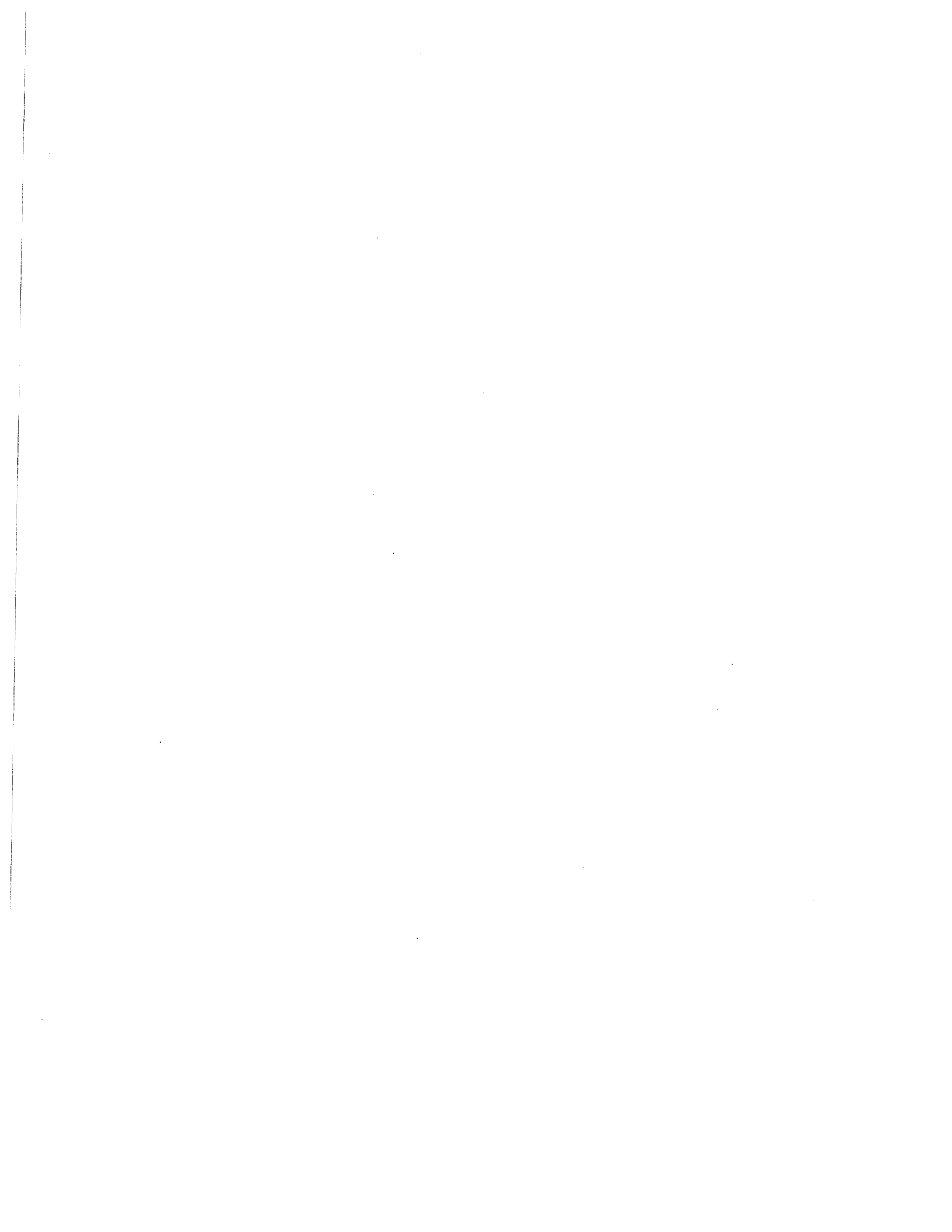
The Allapattah produce market district has been overwhelmed over the years by several problems including crime, a homeless population, health concerns, traffic congestion, and environmental issues that if not continually maintained have a tendency to flourish in a negative manner. A successful model that was implemented over a decade ago by then Commander M. Colombo and the vision of one of his officers, William Clayton, has become an instrumental piece of our new initiative in revitalizing and stabilizing the crime issues in the produce market district. Through the transition of different police administrations, economical development, growth in population, different police force realignments, this produce market district quickly evolved into the primary dilemma of crime in the Allapattah community.

#### ANALYSIS

Several analytical approaches and data sources were successfully utilized in addressing these issues. Officer Felix Delgado and the Problem Solving Team (PST) officers reviewed the results of analysis of calls for service and crime statistics to develop a better understanding of the criminal activity flourishing in this area. In an effort to develop a comprehensive industrial/commercial street traffic plan for the area, a traffic analysis was conducted. The goal of the traffic analysis was to develop a designated commercial access route to the produce market district area from the major arterial road system, and to avoid the surrounding residential communities. An extensive code enforcement/zoning analysis of all the commercial enterprises in the area was conducted in an effort to develop a plan to address the problems of waste disposal, pollution, and illegal commercial operations.

This plan would also address the discarded produce, code violations and the application of standards for littering and illegal dumping. Aside from the formal studies and analytical initiatives, Officer Delgado and the PST officers have established a continuous presence, thus developing an extremely close rapport with the business operators and the regulatory agency personnel focused on the area.

#### RESPONSE



The issues creating the deterioration at the produce market district demanded a series of continual responses beyond the more traditional law and code enforcement methodologies. The officers and code enforcement personnel work closely with all the commercial entities to address code violation issues, as well as improving the methods of disposing of wasted produce. In response to the urging of the PST officers and Officer Delgado, business operators continue building locked enclosures around their individual trash bins. This practice not only enhances the beautification effort in the area, but also prevents access to the outdated produce that is disposed of in dumpsters.

## ASSESSMENT

In general, the situation at the produce market district continues to this date remaining remarkably transformed. As a result of a series of continued discussions and meetings between the business operators and the various regulatory agencies responsible for health, sanitation and pollution issues, code enforcement procedures have been clarified and businesses continue efforts towards complete compliance. The homeless population has been virtually eliminated and the crime rate in the neighborhood has been significantly reduced.

## SCANNING (Problem):

The Allapattah produce market district has been overwhelmed over the years by several problems including crime, a homeless population, health concerns, traffic congestion, and environmental issues that if not continually maintained have a tendency to flourish in a negative manner. A successful model that was implemented over a decade ago by then Cmdr Colombo and the vision of one of his officers, William Clayton, has become an instrumental piece of our new initiative in revitalizing and stabilizing the crime issues in the Produce Market District. Through the transition of different police administrations, economical development, growth in population, different police force realignments, this Market District quickly evolved into the primary dilemma of crime in the Allapattah community.

Processing fresh produce for the Southeast United States, through the Port of Miami, The Miami International Airport and the railroad is a key point for the commercial shipping of highway transportation systems. The Produce Market also distributes fresh produce to the local supermarkets, local restaurants and cruise ships in the area.

Many garment wholesale outlets, as well as some moderately priced working-class residential communities surround this five by five city block area. In the past, the produce market district had been known as a troubled neighborhood, riddled with a wide range of crimes, a homeless population, health hazards, and a general disquiet that had a negative impact on the economic infrastructure and quality of life in the surrounding area. A few of the local business operators had been allowing their facilities to deteriorate, which were characterized by unpainted structures, garbage scattered and overgrown lots, and overflowing garbage containers. The

neighborhood's streets were not capable of supporting the increasing flow of large commercial trucks, which in turn generated major traffic congestion throughout the area. Produce distributors were illegally disposing of rotted produce, which creates a significant health and pollution danger to the merchants and citizens. A homeless population problem had contributed to an increasing level of criminal activity in the neighborhood. Officer Delgado, PST officers, and code enforcement personnel assigned to the Allapattah Neighborhood Enhancement Team (NET) area received frequent complaints concerning the pollution problems, heavy road traffic, inadequate parking and staging areas, illegal dumping, code violations, and homeless population in the produce market district and surrounding area. The PST officers and Officer Delgado also noted a spike in burglaries to the area. Residents in the neighborhoods closest to the produce market district expressed concern regarding the dangers and congestion created by the tractor-trailer trucks and forklifts on their small community streets, the disturbing levels of street crime and home burglaries, as well as the persistent homeless population. Produce shippers complained about the inadequate transportation infrastructure as well as the pollution that created a negative impact on their businesses. The following agencies are vital in identifying the nature and extent of the problems:

- City of Miami Solid Waste Department
- Miami-Dade County Health Department
- State of Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
- Allapattah NET Code Enforcement personnel and Police PST officers
- Commercial Produce distributors at the Produce Market
- Residents in the adjacent communities
- Homeless Assistance Center
- Miami-Dade County Department of Environmental Resource Management

As the central point for produce distribution throughout the Southeastern United States, the produce market district is an essential component of The City of Miami's economic base. If the produce market district descends into a deteriorated state, the impact is not only economic, but the overall quality of life in the area and surrounding neighborhoods also suffer. This problem has become an ongoing priority for the City of Miami for several reasons. The illegal disposal of waste produce into the sewer system is considered a significant pollution factor in the Miami River, which has been the target of a major revitalization initiative by the City of Miami. Any illegal dumping in the area results in health and sanitation hazards for the produce market district and the surrounding residential area.

Crime in the area is also an ongoing concern that can disrupt the normal business and social interaction in the neighborhood and can contribute to lower property values. The level of truck traffic can also create a safety hazard on the residential streets in the surrounding area if left unattended. The area's "stakeholders" realize that this situation can deteriorate rapidly and can have a negative impact on their business interests if problems are not addressed as they arise. The quality of life in the adjacent residential neighborhood can also be degraded by the crime, pollution and heavy traffic. The local business owners and residents understand that by creating this partnership with law enforcement, code enforcement, and the regulatory agencies, it is a vital component in addressing these issues that can have a harmful impact on their businesses and homes.



## ANALYSIS

Several analytical approaches and data sources were successfully utilized in addressing these issues. Officer Delgado and the PST officers reviewed the results of analysis of calls for service and crime statistics to develop a better understanding of the criminal activity plaguing the area. In an effort to develop a comprehensive industrial/commercial street traffic plan for the area, a traffic analysis was conducted. The goal of the traffic analysis was to develop a designated commercial access route to the produce market district area from the major arterial road system, and to avoid the residential communities. An extensive zoning analysis of all the commercial enterprises in the area was also conducted in an effort to develop a plan to address the problems of waste disposal, pollution, and illegal commercial operations. This plan would also address the code violations and application of standards for littering and illegal dumping.

Aside from the formal studies and analytical initiatives, Officer Delgado and the PST officers established a continuous presence, developing an extremely close rapport with the business operators and the regulatory agency personnel focused on the area. These observations are a vital source of information on the dynamics of the produce market district and provide keen insight into the ills that are impacting the area. The turbulence at the produce market district is a daily occurrence, peaking during the early morning hours (2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.) when large trucks jam the area for the transfer of produce from the loading docks to the trucks. In the past, the produce market district's infrastructure was unable to support the increasing tempo of daily operations. Another constant challenge at the produce market district, are the homeless people. The homeless population is drawn to the produce market district due to the availability of outdated, discarded produce and the limited opportunity for work loading and unloading trucks. A segment of the business community continued to illegally dump trash and outdated produce on the streets and in vacant lots in the area. Their garbage bins overflowed with expired produce, attracting both the homeless as well as rodents. Some of these offenders are reluctant to expend the resources to properly manage their waste products or improve their facilities.

Additionally, some of the produce shippers disregard the parking and traffic control restrictions, continuing to illegally park trucks along the streets, creating major traffic congestion problems for the other businesses in the area. The victims in this situation are the residents in the neighboring communities, and the business operators who expended the resources to maintain their business infrastructures in compliance with the regulatory requirements. The residents can also be victimized by criminal activities in their neighborhoods, and are often exposed to the traffic congestion and noise created by the large trucks supporting the produce distributors. The business owners, who made the efforts to comply with the various codes and regulations can fall victim to the continued deterioration of their commercial neighborhood without the ongoing efforts by these officers. The damages that can be created by the any ongoing deterioration at the produce market district can become overwhelming in an instant. The residents in the neighboring residential communities can also become victimized by the criminal activities, traffic congestion, and noise as well as decreasing property values. If non-compliant businesses allow their facilities to deteriorate, the overall quality of life and economic well-being, in general, suffers. Individual businesses will be unable to retain competent employees, as the produce market district would be

perceived as a "below standard" workplace. Business owners would then become reluctant to reinvest, as the economic future would grow dimmer.

The homeless population in the area if left unaddressed constantly becomes the source for criminal activities, including pilferage from the businesses, and burglaries. Prior to assignment of the PST officers and the implementation of this problem-oriented model, the problems at the produce market district were normally addressed by a more traditional law enforcement and code enforcement procedures. Police officers reacted to criminal activities in response to complaints and calls for service. Regulatory agencies periodically conducted inspections and issued violations and levied fines on non-complying businesses. An antagonistic attitude would still exist between the businesses and the law enforcement and code enforcement officials. Analysis of the situation at the produce market district indicated that if not maintained properly the improper and illegal disposal of waste and outdated produce results in the evolution of the homeless population, which in turn creates the basis for increased criminal activities in the area. Analysis of the traffic congestion issue reveals that the transportation infrastructure is inadequate to support the expanding transshipment requirements. The analysis further reveals that the fundamental problem at the produce market district in the past was that the business operators had been allowed to operate with very limited oversight by the various regulatory agencies concerned with health, sanitation and pollution. The volume of produce being processed has increased over the years, and operators, under pressure to maintain the increased tempo of operations, might tend to disregard sanitation standards. The infrastructure designed to process the waste produced can become inadequate if not serviced and maintained, and the distributors would revert to utilizing illegal means to dispose of unusable produce, resulting in an extremely serious health problem as well as forming a breeding ground for the development of the homeless population.

Any illegal disposal of waste into the sewers can pollute the Miami River. The increase in transportation not matched with the appropriate transportation infrastructure improvements, results in major traffic congestion problems. To develop a more detailed understanding of the overall problem at the produce market district, it is essential that the PST stays knowledgeable with the functions and internal processes of the various businesses that comprise the market. The PST developed vital insight into the timelines inherent in the transshipment of fresh produce, where the majority of the activities are conducted during the early morning hours (2:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.). There is a minimum of activity during the daylight hours, when the transshipment of produce is directed primarily at the small markets. The PST also needs to understand the economic pressure that is impacted upon the business operators. The smaller, less prosperous operations dependent upon quicker "turnover" of fresh produce, sometimes do not invest resources in long term storage and refrigeration facilities. These operations frequently conduct their loading/unloading activities along the streets contributing to the traffic congestion. These smaller operations are often reluctant to expend the resources on the requirements for compliance with the various codes and regulations related to health, sanitation and pollution. Additionally, they are less inclined to improve the quality of their facilities, and might leave their installations unfenced and their garbage bins overflowing with discarded produce. In general, the more insight the PST develops in the overall process of operations in the produce market district, the more effective their relationship with the business operators become.

Additionally, the location of the produce market district is a major factor contributing to the traffic congestion and noise problem. The transportation infrastructure that was developed to support the residential communities adjacent to the produce market district had proven to be woefully inadequate to support the increased traffic related to the ever expanding produce market district. Discussions of these problems are conducted in several venues. The City of Miami Solid Waste Department hosts a meeting with the business owners and officials from the various cities, county and state regulatory and law enforcement agencies focused on the produce market district. The purpose of the meetings is to inform the business owners of any changes in the process being utilized in the code enforcement and inspection system.

## RESPONSE

The issues that create any deterioration at the produce market district demand a series of continual responses beyond the more traditional law and code enforcement methodologies. The PST officers and the code enforcement personnel work closely with all the commercial entities to address any code violation issues, as well as improve the methods of disposing of the wasted produce. At the urging of the PST officers and Officer Delgado, business operators continue building locked enclosures around their individual trash bins. This practice not only enhances the beautification effort in the area, but also prevents access to the outdated produce that is disposed of in these dumpsters. The PST officers have advised all business operators regarding the requirements to enclose their trash bins and continue to monitor the enclosures. Any businesses continuously failing to comply are cited and fined until they are brought into compliance. The PST officers also diligently work with the commercial operators to develop improved parking, unloading, and turn-around facilities for the large trucks serving the businesses in the area. PST officers, along with Officer Delgado, continuously patrol the area, warning business operators about illegally parked vehicles, and eventually arranging for towing of vehicles that are frequently in violation of parking restrictions.

The Florida East Coast Railroad agreed to lease its property adjacent to the railroad tracks to the business owners, who, in turn, keep the area clear and also developed parking spaces. Multiple agencies involved with environmental and pollution issues continue to focus their efforts on the methodologies that the businesses dispose of their outdated produce and any impact those procedures could have on the sewer systems and/or other environmental elements. Officer Delgado collaborates closely with the Homeless Assistance Center to address the problems associated with the homeless population. Access to waste produced by the homeless is eliminated by enclosing and securing the trash bins. By denying access to outdated produce, the homeless population continues to diminish, and the crime rate in the neighborhood has dropped significantly. The traffic congestion issue is the focus of a traffic flow study and Officer Delgado implemented parking restrictions to improve the traffic flow in the area. Business owners continue to improve their buildings, loading docks, securing their parking lots and removing the trash and litter from their property.

Prior to any implementation of the response, some traditional law enforcement criteria was utilized to establish a perspective on the issue. A primary criterion was the level of calls for service and increasing criminal activities in the neighborhood. The department is sensitive to the

impact that any deterioration at the produce market district has on the quality of life and social values in the community, and determine that the most expedient and cost effective approach would be the implementation of the problem solving approach. The goals of the response plan are to:

- Significantly reduce any pollution created by improper disposal of waste.
- Keep improving sanitation and health standards.
- Reduce the traffic congestion in neighborhood streets and continue enhancing the transportation infrastructure in the produce market district.
- Reduce any criminal activity in the area thus reducing the fear of crime in the neighboring residential areas.
- Reduce the homeless population in the area by eliminating the various inducements that continue attracting the homeless population.
- Promote a partnership between the commercial entities and City of Miami officials responsible for enhancing the overall quality of life in the community.
- Encourage the business operators to cooperate in a self-policing agreement focused on overall improvement in the quality of life and enhancement of their long-term commercial interests.

The major difficulty encountered during our response implementation was the inability of city and county agencies to deploy resources and react with the same level of intensity that characterizes the officer's approach. This shortfall is generally the result of resource constraints within the agencies and bureaucratic difficulties in coordinating the efforts of multiple organizations focused on a wide range of problems beyond the issue at the produce market district.

## ASSESSMENT

In general, the situation at the produce market district continues to this date remaining remarkably transformed. As a result of a series of continued discussions and meetings between the business operators and the various regulatory agencies responsible for health, sanitation and pollution issues, code enforcement procedures have been clarified and businesses are rapidly approaching and staying within compliance. The homeless population has been virtually eliminated and the crime rate in the neighborhood has been significantly reduced.

Business owners and operators have undertaken a wide range of initiatives to improve their facilities, and parking lots enclosed, trash bins enclosed and secured. Trash and litter have been reduced to a minimum, and volunteer beautification projects have also been undertaken. There has also been a renewed interest in investment in the area. Officer Delgado and his counterparts in the city and county agencies are continuously evaluating the effectiveness of their efforts, and making the appropriate adjustments as necessary. The major problems were resource constraints impacting on various city and county agencies, which limited their capability to focus on the produce market district issue. Problems also develop in coordinating the efforts of multiple

agencies with citywide responsibilities. The improper disposal of discarded outdated produce has been eliminated. There has been a significant increase in understanding and compliance with health, sanitation and pollution codes and regulations on the on the part of the business operators in the area.

Business owners have demonstrated an interest in reinvesting and revitalizing the economy in the produce market district. Analysis of the calls for service and the crime statistics reveal that the criminal activity had been significantly reduced. Substantial reinvestment in the area by various business owners indicates that there is a renewed confidence in the economic opportunities. A better understanding of the resources and constraints impacting the various agencies as well as the mutual goals of the effort would have served to improve the coordination process focused on the produce market district. Also, whenever there is a migration of homeless people away from an area, there is a concern that the homeless are simply being displaced to another sector of the community. The Homeless Assistance Center has been responsive in providing a wide range of counseling and support to the homeless people that leave the produce market district. Their effort is directed at preventing the displacement of the homeless population to other neighborhoods.

Some aspects of the response plan require continued monitoring and a continuing effort to maintain the results. Officer Delgado continues to maintain a close, daily interaction with the business owners and encourages an ongoing dialogue regarding mutual interests in the area. Traffic issues also require continuous monitoring to ensure that parking restrictions are complied with and that loading/unloading operations are conducted in the appropriate locations. Enforcement of health, sanitation and pollution codes and regulations require periodic revisits to ensure total compliance on the part of the business operators. Routine police patrols enforce a wide range of federal, state and local law enforcement statutes. Business owners continue to secure their waste containers, restricting access to expired produce by the homeless, virtually eliminating the vagrancy problem and criminal activities. A complete road redesign project that was completed to reduce traffic congestion issues has had great results. Water samples along the Miami River continue to show a decrease in pollution and bacteria. Meetings are also held by the Allapattah Business Owners Association to identify and address any concerns that arise at the produce market district.

#### FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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