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Robbery and Violence Prevention in Small Retail Businesses

By Thomas Chronister, Carri Casteel, Corinne Peek-Asa, Dan Hartley, and Harlan Amandus

Police departments work with small businesses to seek methodologies to thwart crimes. In Oxnard, California, it was found that the most effective strategies to mitigate robberies and the resulting violence might be surprising because they are low in cost; easy to implement and sustain; do not require any special technological know-how to use; and, for the most part, are also good for the business. After arriving at this conclusion, the Oxnard Police Department joined forces with the occupational safety research community to find the answers.

The National Problem

Robberies are the most frequent cause of work-related homicide, and one of the leading causes of violent injury among workers, especially in the retail industry.[1] The retail industry has the highest costs associated with worker homicide, totaling more than $2.6 billion between 1992 and 2001.[2] Small retail businesses, many of them independently owned, have the highest risk for robbery and homicide.[3] Unfortunately, experience has shown that these businesses may have the least access to information about successful robbery and violence prevention strategies, even though a substantial body of research has demonstrated the effectiveness of such strategies.[4]

Workplace Violence Prevention Program

Over the past 30 years, robbery-reduction programs have been developed from a theory called Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).[5] CPTED is based on modifying an environment to make potential criminals feel exposed and vulnerable while bringing maximum safety at a minimum cost to the establishment. Studies that have evaluated CPTED-based programs in reducing robberies in business settings, primarily corporate convenience stores, showed median robbery decreases between 23.5 percent and 44.5 percent.

Building on this work, researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and national experts in commercial robbery prevention developed the Workplace Violence Prevention Program (WVPP), a CPTED-based intervention to give to small retail and service establishments in Los Angeles.[6] The WVPP focused on seven elements the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)[7] and the National Institute for Occupational Safety (NIOSH)[8] recommended to effectively reduce robbery in late-night retail establishments:

- Keep a minimum amount of cash in the register
- Properly place safes
- Maintain good visibility into and outside of the business
- Maintain good interior and exterior lighting
- Control access into and within the business
- Train employees in crime control and injury prevention
- Post safety decals

These low-cost, low-technology approaches seem counterintuitive in today's silicon world where high-cost, high-technology products, such as video surveillance systems, robbery alarms, and virtual guard tours are quickly recommended. In the WVPP studies and the Oxnard experience, it was found that focusing on these seven strategies offered simplicity and effectiveness for the customer and deterred more crime.

These elements emphasize low-cost, low-maintenance recommendations that considered the small business owners' financial and time constraints. In the Los Angeles study, the WVPP was disseminated by Certified Protection Professionals[9] to small, independently owned businesses at high risk for robbery and robbery-related injury: grocery stores, gas stations/convenience stores, liquor stores, motels, and

restaurants.

WVPP's primary focus was on preventing robberies and reducing related injuries. However, because many of these businesses work with intoxicated and potentially violent customers, the program also trained employees to recognize—and intervene—when a customer could become violent.

The WVPP reduced violent crimes by 26 percent and robberies and attempted robberies by 41 percent among high-compliance establishments. In non-compliant establishments, violent crime increased by 43 percent.[10]

The Los Angeles study also found that customers as well as employees are at risk of victimization from a workplace robbery or other violent crime. Customers were 31 percent more likely than employees to be injured during a violent crime.[11] In particular, customer injury was more frequent than employee injury during violent crimes in bars, restaurants, convenience stores, and motels, but less frequent in grocery or liquor stores.

Effective Solutions

Research has shown an inverse relationship between the strategies found to be effective and the strategies that businesses actually implement, see figure 1.[12] For example, 91.7 percent of studies find that cash-control policies are an effective strategy. However, only 9.2 percent of businesses studied in Los Angeles had adequate cash-control policies. The correct use of a safe showed a similar disparity: 85.7 percent of studies found safes effective, but only 13.7 percent of businesses used them effectively. Employee training and good visibility also showed higher success than implementation.

Good lighting was the only successful researched strategy that had high implementation by businesses.

Ironically, security cameras, alarm systems, and mirrors were successful strategies in only half or less of the studies, yet more than 70 percent of businesses had installed cameras, and more than 50 percent had installed alarm systems or mirrors. However, in

Percent

■ Percent of studies that examined the strategy and found it to be important in reducing risk of robbery.

▨ Percent of 314 small retail businesses in which the factor was present.

many of the businesses with video surveillance systems, cameras were old or nonfunctioning or not properly directed toward entrances, exits, and cash counters. Before digital video recorders use was mainstream, videotape cassettes were routinely overused, creating poor recordings that decreased the ability to identify criminals.
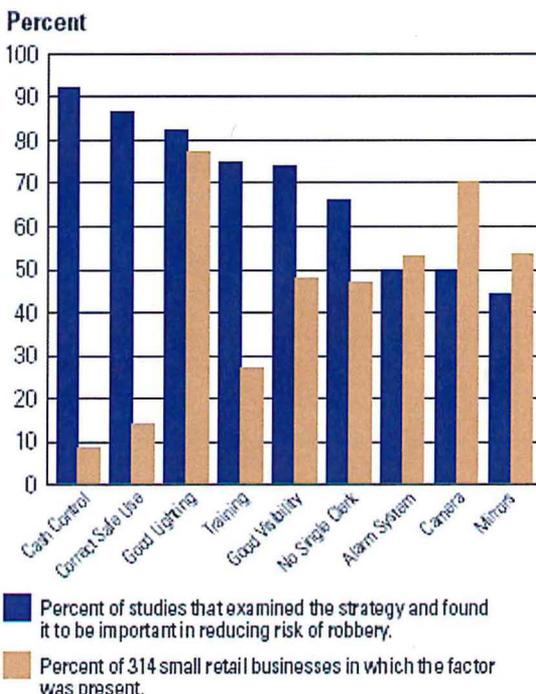
Spreading the Word

Prevention strategies related to retail robbery are well established, but getting the word out to the businesses that need the information presents a significant challenge. Since law enforcement agencies are generally one of the first points of contact after a crime has occurred, they can easily disseminate and build sustainable workplace violence prevention programs in their communities.

NIOSH; the University of North Carolina Injury Prevention Research Center at Chapel Hill (UNC IPRC); the University of Iowa Injury Prevention Research Center (UI IPRC); and the Oxnard, California, Police Department have collaborated on a research project: how to best disseminate effective strategies and gain acceptance of sound business practices useful in preventing crimes of violence in the workplace.

The specific aims of the NIOSH-funded research grant are to do the following:

- Identify effective methods of reaching businesses at high risk of robbery and violent crime, particularly small, independently owned establishments, to increase participation in the WVPP
- Identify effective methods of increasing compliance with WVPP recommendations
- Measure commercial robbery and violent crime rates before and after WVPP implementation

In Oxnard, the WVPP was integrated into an existing crime prevention program called Crime Free Business

(CFB). CFB became the latest addition to an extensive list of programs currently offered through the International Crime Free Association, Inc.,[13] including the highly successful Crime Free Multi-Housing Program, which currently exists in some 2,000 cities worldwide.

The Crime Free Business program (derived from the WVPP) includes a 50-page business operator training manual, an employee training DVD on crime and disorder prevention and control, safety-related signage and decals, training brochures, and a process by which establishments can become a Certified Crime Free Business. The certification program includes the following steps:

- Two-hour training session for business owners and/or managers
- On-site security evaluation
- Individualized recommendations for improving security measures
- On-site follow-up to determine program compliance

Once certified, businesses enjoy the following benefits:

- Improved safety and security to business owners and managers, employees, and customers
- More customers—participation in the program is good for business
- Unlimited access to an Oxnard Police Department crime prevention specialist
- Customized business security program
- Program materials, including employee training brochures and video, decals, and an employee manual
- Updated, ongoing information on local crime and crime prevention strategies
- Invitations to Crime Free special events, such as training in advanced security systems and advanced loss prevention procedures
- Insurance premium discounts

Outreach efforts have included use of local media, chambers of commerce, direct mailings, training of patrol officers, and a Web page with embedded video providing an overview of the program.[14] They have also included personal visits to at-risk businesses by police personnel citywide and by private security officers under contract with the City of Oxnard in its Central Business District and mailers through the city's Business Licensing Bureau.

Outreach has resulted in interest from a nationwide top security company, corporate retail chains, and property owners. The program has also gained considerable interest among other law enforcement agencies eager for CFB training.

The knowledge gained during the Oxnard experience will be shared with additional law enforcement agencies disseminating Crime Free Business in their jurisdictions as part of a new NIOSH grant funded in 2008. Participating agencies include the Las Vegas Metropolitan, Nevada, Police Department and the San Ramon, California, Police Department.

Crime Prevention a Priority

In this era of shrinking budgets and reprioritization of assets and strategies, crime prevention efforts may be one of the first programs to be cut in law enforcement agencies, which is unfortunate as it violates the first Peelian principle: "The basic mission for which the police exist is to prevent crime and disorder."

Modern law enforcement agencies must resist the urge to become merely a reactionary force again. Investing time and effort in prevention efforts on the front end may reduce crime, disorder, violence, and police service demands on the back end.

The FBI states that "reaching those employers and employees and finding ways to extend antiviolence programs into their workplaces may be the most challenging task facing any national effort to reduce workplace violence."[15] The FBI also believes that workplace violence prevention needs to be put on the agenda of community-policing programs and addressed in police contacts with community groups and neighborhood businesses. Law enforcement agencies are the best facilitators to further this crime prevention effort because they have the best understanding of the community's problems and have the authority and responsibility to act.[16]

The findings and conclusions in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. The authors are team members for the NIOSH-funded collaborative research project titled, Community-Based Workplace Violence Intervention for Businesses at High Risk of Robbery.

For more information on the Crime Free Business program, readers can contact Oxnard Police Detective Martin Ennis at MartinEnnis@OxnardPD.org or Dr. Casteel at ccasteel@email.unc.edu. ∎

Notes:
[1]U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries Summary 2007*, (2008) http://www.bls.gov/news.release/cfoi.nr0.htm (accessed August 20, 2009); Eric F. Sygnatur and Guy A. Toscano, "Work-Related Homicides: The Facts," *Compensation and Working Conditions*

(Spring 2003): 3–8; and Scott Richardson and Janice Windau, "Fatal and Nonfatal Assaults in the Workplace, 1996 to 2000," *Clinics in Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 3 (November 2003): 673–689.

[2]Daniel Hartley, Elyce A. Biddle, and E. Lynn Jenkins, "Societal Cost of Workplace Homicides in the United States, 1992–2001," *American Journal of Industrial Medicine* 47, no. 6 (2005): 518–527.

[3]Dawn N. Castillo and E. Lynn Jenkins, "Industries and Occupations at High Risk for Work-Related Homicide," *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 36 (February 1994): 125–132.

[4]Carri Casteel and Corinne Peek-Asa, "Effectiveness of Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) in Reducing Robberies," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 18 (2000): 99–115.

[5]C. Ray Jeffrey, *Crime Prevention through Environmental Design* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1971).

[6]Corinne Peek-Asa, Carri Casteel, Lisa Meneshian, Rosemary J. Erickson, and Jess F. Kraus, "Compliance to a Workplace Violence Prevention Program in Small Businesses," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 26 (2004): 276–283.

[7]U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, *Recommendations for Workplace Violence Prevention Programs in Late-Night Retail Establishments*, OSHA Publication 3153 (1998), http://www.osha.gov/Publications/osha3153.pdf (accessed August 20, 2009).

[8]National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), *Violence in the Workplace: Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies* (Cincinnati: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1996) http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/violcont.html (accessed August 20, 2009).

[9]The term Certified Protection Professional is a designation in security management offered by ASIS International, formerly known as the American Society for Industrial Security, to professionals who have demonstrated competency in the areas of security solutions and best business practices; see http://www.asisonline.org/certification/cpp/index.xml for more information.

[10]Carri Casteel, Corinne Peek-Asa, Sander Greenland, Lawrence D. Chu, and Jess F. Kraus, "A Study of the Effectiveness of a Workplace Violence Intervention for Small Retail and Service Establishments," *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 50 (December 2008): 1365–1370.

[11]Corinne Peek-Asa, Carri Casteel, Jess F. Kraus, and Paul Whitten, "Employee and Customer Injury During Violent Crimes in Retail and Service Businesses," *American Journal of Public Health* 96 (October 2006): 1867–1872.

[12]Corinne Peek-Asa and Lynn Jenkins, "Workplace Violence: How Do We Improve Approaches to Prevention?" *Clinics in Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 3 (November 2003): 659–672.

[13]The International Crime Free Association, Inc., comprises police officers and other employees of law enforcement or other government agencies who are employed on a full-time basis to coordinate any one of, or a combination of, the various Crime Free Programs. Additional information can be found online at www.crime-free-association.org.

[14]National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, University of North Carolina Injury Prevention Research Center, University of Iowa Injury Prevention Research Center, International Crime Free Association, and Oxnard Police Department "Crime Free Business," Oxnard, California, Police Department, http://OxnardPD.org/CrimeFreeBusiness (accessed August 20, 2009).

[15]Critical Incident Group, National Center for the Analysis of Violent Crime, *Workplace Violence: Issues in Response*, eds. Eugene A. Rugala and Arnold R. Isaacs (Quantico, Virginia: Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2002): 50, http://www.fbi.gov/publications/violence.pdf (accessed August 20, 2009).

[16]Carri Casteel, Tom Chronister, James L. Grayson, and Jess F. Kraus, "Partnerships and Collaborations to Prevent Robbery-Related Workplace Violence," *Clinics in Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 3 (November 2003): 763-774.

Oxnard Police Department

Minimum Standards and Recommendations for Crime Free Business Certification

Minimum Standards for Certification

1. Training
   a. Business operator attends Crime Free training
   b. Business operator has policy for training employees

2. Cash management
   a. Keep $50 or less in register
   b. Locate drop safe at cash register
   c. Place decal on safe
   d. Post minimum cash sticker on door
   e. Have written cash management policy
   f. Have policy for making bank deposits

3. Lighting
   a. Maintain business-appropriate interior lighting fixtures not broken, lightbulbs not missing)
   b. (b) Maintain good exterior (sidewalk/parking lot) lighting

4. Visibility
   a. Maintain clear line of sight to cash register from street (if modifiable)
   b. Maintain clear line of sight into interior business (if modifiable)
   c. Ensure no place outside to hide (if modifiable)

d. Ensure no place inside to hide

5. Access control
   a. Keep locks on doors in good working condition
   b. Keep doors in good working condition
   c. Keep non-customer doors locked

6. General appearance/facilities management
   a. Keep premises graffiti-free
   b. Keep premises clean

7. Signage
   a. Post a height marker
   b. If certified Crime Free, display decal in plain view

Additional recommendations and training topics (not required for certification)

- CCTV
- Alarms
- Access control / perimeter control
- Mirrors
- Fraud prevention
- Background investigations
- Organized retail crime prevention
- Concepts of premises liability
- De-escalation (for dealing with potentially violent customers and employees)

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