

Glendale, AZ Smart Policing Initiative

Reducing Convenience Store Theft

Smart Policing Initiative Research Brief

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Smart Policing: Research Snapshot

The Glendale, AZ Smart Policing team addressed thefts at Circle K™ convenience stores using a problem solving model. Thefts were targeted because they clustered at these store locations more than at other store chains, because of the potential for these offenses to escalate into violence and the likelihood of attracting more serious crimes at these locations, and because of the burden placed on police resources.

The Glendale team conducted GIS analysis to map convenience stores and their call activity, and determined that store location in high crime districts did not sufficiently explain the problem. The Glendale SPI team explored alternative(s) to the “crime prone neighborhood” explanation by conducting additional analysis including meeting with Circle K management, CPTED surveys of the stores, and surveillance of the most active locations. Based on this work, the Glendale team concluded that Circle K management practices contributed to the theft problem. These practices included inadequate staffing, failure to respond to panhandling and loitering, and violations of basic CPTED principles (line of sight, product placement, etc.)

The team developed a multi-faceted response that included engagement of Circle K management, recommendations for improved store operation and design, prevention efforts targeted at youth, and suppression operations focusing on the most active convenience store locations. The team documented significant decreases in calls for service at three of the six target stores during the Smart Policing Initiative project period. The Glendale experience highlights a number of lessons that may be useful for other police departments dealing with this problem, such as likely convenience store reactions to a problem assessment, the importance of the problem-solving model, and the critical importance of developing active partnerships.

GLENDALE, AZ SMART POLICING INITIATIVE: REDUCING CONVENIENCE STORE THEFT

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INTRODUCTION

The Glendale (AZ) Police Department and its research partners in the School of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Arizona State University sought to address crime and disorder at Circle K™ convenience stores. The SPI¹ team targeted this problem because it placed a substantial burden on police resources, and it threatened the safety of both customers and Circle K employees. Indeed, from 2008-2010 there were a number of incidents in the Phoenix metropolitan area in which thefts from Circle K stores escalated into violence.² The Glendale Smart Policing team was concerned about this potential for violence as well as Circle K stores serving as breeding grounds for more serious types of crime. The Glendale team developed their initiative using a problem-oriented policing framework centered on the SARA model: **Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment.**

I. OBJECTIVES 1 AND 2: SCANNING AND ANALYSIS

The Glendale Smart Policing team achieved the scanning and analysis objectives during 20 hours of advanced training on problem-oriented policing using the model curriculum developed by the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing:

http://www.popcenter.org/learning/model_curriculum

During the training (led by the ASU research partners), officers identified thefts at convenience stores as a longstanding problem that placed a tremendous burden on police resources, and that could potentially attract more serious crime and violence. Analysis showed that a majority of the thefts were occurring at Circle K stores (much involving theft of beer), compared to other convenience store chains.

Table 1 shows the results of this analysis, highlighting the top generators of calls for police service among the 65 convenience stores in Glendale over the past three years. Circle K locations held the top ten spots with several generating an enormous call volume – in some cases more than 500 calls per year. The top call generating non-Circle K locations are also shown, including two QTs (Quik Trip stores) and a 7-11. Their call volume was considerably less than the Circle K stores. Some rough cost estimates demonstrate the impact of this call volume on police. Glendale data indicate that one call takes 23 minutes of officer time. With an average officer salary of \$46.26 per hour, the most active Circle K store has cost the Glendale Police Department an average of \$8,368 per year ([1,428 calls x \$17.58]/3 years). Employing the same cost assumptions, the top six call generating Circle K locations have cost the Glendale Police Department an average of

¹ The Glendale SPI team included two specialized units, each staffed with a Sergeant, 6-9 police officers, and a civilian community action officer (CAT) specializing in crime prevention. The sector Lieutenant led the team, which also worked closely with the Department's lead crime analyst and property crimes detectives.

² The most notable of these cases involved a Good Samaritan getting killed after intervening to stop the theft (<http://www.azfamily.com/news/local/Suspect-in-Phoenix-homicide-arrested-in-Mexico-122962593.html>).

Table 1
Highest Generators of Calls for Service, 2008-2010, among Glendale (AZ) Convenience Stores

| Name | Address | Totals | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |
|----------|-------------------------|--------|------|------|------|
| Circle K | 4306 W MARYLAND AVE | 1,428 | 381 | 555 | 492 |
| Circle K | 5880 W CAMELBACK RD | 1,148 | 199 | 396 | 553 |
| Circle K | 5907 W BETHANY HOME RD | 1,062 | 201 | 524 | 337 |
| Circle K | 5102 W CAMELBACK RD | 1,020 | 304 | 434 | 282 |
| Circle K | 7428 N 51ST AVE | 918 | 323 | 322 | 273 |
| Circle K | 6305 W MARYLAND AVE | 880 | 273 | 331 | 276 |
| Circle K | 4648 W BETHANY HOME RD | 861 | 282 | 306 | 273 |
| Circle K | 9002 N 47TH AVE | 664 | 271 | 206 | 187 |
| Circle K | 6002 W GRAND AVE | 527 | 163 | 159 | 20 |
| Circle K | 6937 N. 75th AVE | 494 | 169 | 136 | 189 |
| QuikTrip | 6702 W. GLENDALE AVE | 402 | 127 | 149 | 126 |
| 7-11 | 6010 W. BETHANY HOME RD | 197 | 69 | 75 | 53 |
| QuikTrip | 5082 NW GRAND AVE | 185 | 58 | 56 | 71 |

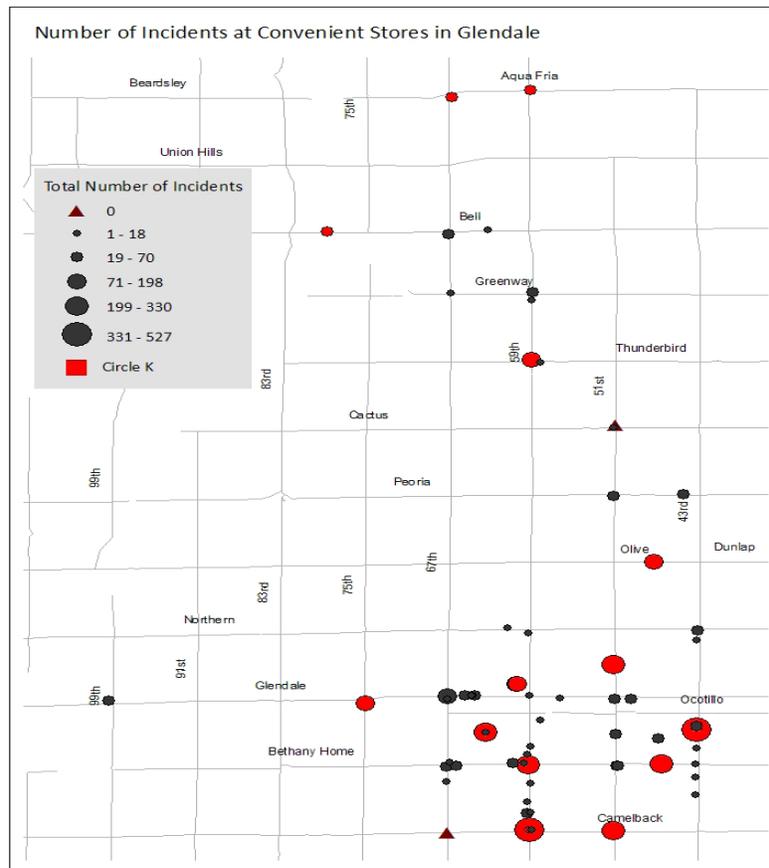
nearly \$38,000 per year in officer time.³ This disproportionate call volume at Circle K stores is a considerable burden on police resources. The next part of the analysis stage determined why the Circle K locations were experiencing such a high call volume, particularly in comparison with other convenience stores. One potential explanation (one that Circle K management offered) is that Circle K stores are in higher crime neighborhoods.

In order to explore this possibility, the Glendale team engaged in GIS analysis to map

convenience stores and their call activity – and the results are shown in Figure 1. Circle Ks are represented in red, and the other convenience stores are represented in black. As the legend indicates, the size of the dot indicates the size of the problem (for 2010). Clearly, there are numerous intersections where high-volume Circle Ks are located right next to stores with few calls for service (“big red dots” surrounded by “small black dots”). As a result, the Glendale SPI team began exploring alternative(s) to Circle K management’s crime prone neighborhood explanation.

³ The Glendale Police Department provided these salary and call-time estimates. The cost estimates only account for officer time (salary) and some overhead (equipment, fuel, etc.). Related police costs to dispatch, supervise, and process reports, as well as downstream costs for any calls that result in arrest and prosecution, would add significantly to these estimates (e.g., costs would likely exceed \$50,000).

Figure 1
Glendale (AZ) Convenience Stores by Location, Type and Calls for Service (2010)



The Glendale SPI team conducted additional analysis which included meeting with Circle K management, CPTED (Crime Prevention through Environmental Design) surveys of the stores, and surveillance of the most active locations. Based on this work, the Glendale team concluded that Circle K management practices were largely responsible for the theft problem. These practices included inadequate staffing, failure to respond to panhandling and loitering, and violations of basic CPTED principles (line of sight, product placement, etc.)

II. OBJECTIVES 3 AND 4: RESPONSE AND ASSESSMENT

The Glendale SPI team developed a multi-pronged response plan to address the theft problem at the six most troublesome Circle K locations.

Response 1: Intervention with Circle K

The Glendale Smart Policing team identified a number of business practices that increased both risk and opportunity for theft. Common problems were identified across locations, such as poor lighting, placement of beer on the floor close to the door, poor/obstructed lines of site,

graffiti, and panhandling and trespassing on Circle K properties. Also, during the shifts when thefts were most likely to occur (Friday and Saturday nights), only one clerk staffed the store. The Glendale team made numerous recommendations to Circle K to alter these practices (e.g., the actual CPTED surveys were sent to the Circle K Loss Prevention Supervisor and management, and recommendations were also made verbally during in-person meetings).

Assessment

The Glendale Smart Policing team's intervention efforts with Circle K produced mixed results. On one hand, there were some clear victories. Circle K loss prevention staff provided training to SPI officers with regard to access and use of the store surveillance systems⁴, the loss prevention staff began sharing information and working with detectives to identify repeat offenders, and they participated in the suppression efforts (Operation Not-so-Convenient – see below). There was also sporadic success with some CPTED approaches – such as the removal of signage on windows at a few stores, and posted trespassing signs at all stores.⁵ For the most part, however, the Glendale team experienced resistance from Circle K management/corporate headquarters. Straightforward CPTED recommendations were often ignored – especially those that required a financial commitment. For example, Circle K refused to increase staffing during “hot times”

because of the additional cost associated with a second employee.

The SPI team adopted two approaches in response to Circle K's resistance. The first involved the creation of a Working Group of law enforcement agencies in the Glendale area including departments in Mesa, Tempe, Peoria, and Phoenix. The Working Group served to increase leverage on Circle K through a collective voice. The ASU research partners collected call for service data from all the agencies in the Working Group and produced a multi-city convenience store theft report which demonstrated that the experiences in Glendale (e.g., the preponderance of criminal activity at Circle K stores) were common to these other cities as well.

http://cvpcs.asu.edu/sites/default/files/content/products/CVPCsreport_convstore_2011_3PDs.pdf

The second approach involved presenting the multi-city report to the local media, which resulted in both print and television stories focusing on the Circle K theft problem (e.g. public shaming).⁶ These strategies were effective in both getting Circle K management back to the table and involved as a stakeholder, and in re-starting the discussion over the modification of management practices.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hQZ6s2BTAo8>

⁴ Prior to this training, officers who responded to a call at a Circle K would have to wait until a manager accessed the system and provided a still photo of the suspect. After the training, the responding officers could access the system themselves and download a photo immediately.

⁵ Circle K management also assisted in the development of a victim impact statement to be completed and submitted at court hearings of theft suspects.

⁶ See: http://www.abc15.com/dpp/news/region_southeast_valley/mesa/report%3A-valley-circle-k%27s-are-hotspots-for-crime;
[http://www.azcentral.com/community/glendale/articles/2011/07/10/20110710asu-study-circle-k-police-calls.html.](http://www.azcentral.com/community/glendale/articles/2011/07/10/20110710asu-study-circle-k-police-calls.html)

Response 2: Prevention

Results from analysis and targeted suppression efforts quickly demonstrated that a significant number of the thefts were committed by juveniles (about 25% of arrestees). As a result, the SPI team developed a number of prevention strategies to deliver a clear message about the seriousness and potential long-term consequences of this crime. The centerpiece of these efforts involved a partnership with the Glendale Mayor's Youth Advisory Commission (MYAC); and the development of a video public service announcement:

Assessment

Assessing the impact of longer-term prevention strategies is difficult and these efforts are ongoing. The team continues to monitor the demographic profile of known Circle K theft offenders to identify any notable shifts in the commission of these crimes by youths.

Response 3: Suppression (Operation Not-so-Convenient)

The SPI team also carried out intensive surveillance and enforcement operations at the targeted Circle K stores. These operations took place over nine consecutive weekends in August and September 2010, followed by periodic weekends throughout 2011. The operations included the use of undercover and marked cars, Circle K loss prevention staff, dispatch, and

the research partners (who debriefed arrestees at booking).

Assessment

Operation Not-so-Convenient led to 57 arrests including 15 felonies, as well as nearly \$1,000 in recovered merchandise. Perhaps more importantly, of the 57 arrests, 48 had been adjudicated by the courts by December 2011, resulting in 37 convictions (77% conviction rate among adjudicated cases, with several jail and prison sentences).⁷ The high conviction rate is a consequence of the suspects being caught in the commission of the crime, recovering the stolen merchandise, and the video surveillance system.

The Glendale team also examined the impact of the Initiative on calls for service at the six target Circle Ks in comparison to other convenience stores in Glendale. Table 2 shows the average monthly calls for service by store location in the year preceding the Smart Policing Initiative (8/09 – 7/10) and the year during the Initiative (8/10 – 7/11).⁸ The last column shows the change in average monthly calls over time. The six target Circle K stores are listed first, followed by several other non-target Circle Ks in Glendale, and a handful of other locations (in the interest of space, all 65 convenience stores are not shown). Table 2 on the following page shows that there were notable drops in calls for service at three of the six target stores (declines

⁷ At the time this report went to print, only two of the 57 arrestees had their case dismissed. Several defendants were wanted on warrants or their cases were still working their way through the court process. As a result the conviction rate has likely increased. The sentences include three prison terms (e.g., 17 years for an armed robbery suspect), and two county jail terms.

⁸ Analyses will be expanded to the year after the Initiative ended as well (8/11 – 7/12).

of 19%, 31%, and 60%). A quick review of the patterns at the other convenience stores suggests that the trend at the target Circle K

stores was relatively unique and not part of some larger crime trend at convenience stores or in the general area.⁹

| Table 2 | | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Impact on Calls for Service at Glendale Convenience Stores | | | |
| Store Location | 8/09-7/10 | 8/10-7/11 | Change |
| SPI stores | | | |
| 4306 W Maryland | 47.8 (574) | 38.8 (465) | -9 (19% drop) |
| 5880 W Camelback | 43.4 (521) | 44.3 (532) | --- |
| 5907 W Bethany Home | 44.2 (530) | 17.9 (215) | -26 (60% drop) |
| 5102 W Camelback | 30.4 (365) | 21.1 (253) | -9 (31% drop) |
| 7428 N 51st Ave | 20.3 (243) | 24.1 (289) | +4 |
| 4648 W Bethany Home | 21.0 (252) | 20.8 (249) | --- |
| Non-SPI Circle Ks | | | |
| 6305 W Maryland | 26.8 (332) | 17.2 (206) | -9 |
| 9002 N 47th Ave | 16.1 (193) | 13.1 (157) | -3 |
| 6937 N 75th Ave | 14.5 (174) | 17.4 (209) | +3 |
| 6002 W Grand Ave | 14.2 (170) | 18.2 (218) | +4 |
| Other | | | |
| QT: 6702 W Glendale | 11.9 (143) | 12.3 (148) | --- |
| QT: 5082 NW Grand Ave | 4.1 (49) | 5.4 (65) | +1 |
| 7-11: 6010 W Bethany Home | 5.9 (71) | 2.8 (33) | -1 |
| Shell: 6705 W Bethany Home | 3.3 (40) | 2.9 (35) | --- |
| AM/PM: 9920 W Glendale | 4.2 (50) | 2.5 (30) | -1 |

⁹ Although not shown here, Glendale SPI did conduct an analysis of calls for service in the areas surrounding the target Circle K stores during this same time period. Results showed that calls and crime trends in the area were flat. We also examined the patterns at all convenience stores in the city, and again, the trend is generally flat. There is a notable drop in one Circle K store that was not a target store (6305 W Maryland), but this location is about two blocks from a target store. It is unclear whether this may be explained by diffusion of benefits, or something else.

III. LESSONS LEARNED

The success of the Glendale Smart Policing project is attributable primarily to the Initiative's adherence to and complete implementation of the SARA model. The Glendale Initiative demonstrates classic problem-oriented policing: identify a problem (Scanning); determine the underlying conditions causing the problem (Analysis); develop a multi-pronged approach using traditional and non-traditional strategies (Response); and analyze the impact of those strategies to understand what works and does not work (Assessment). This approach led to substantial drops in calls for service at three of the six target locations. Moreover, the success with the Circle K theft problem will serve as a foundation for Glendale's continuing Smart Policing efforts, which will expand to include the department's other patrol zone as well as additional specialized units.

There are a number of lessons from the Glendale experience that should be useful for other police departments dealing with similar problems. First, the convenience store industry is driven by revenue. Much like any other private sector entity, their leaders think and act based on profit, which is much different than how police (and researchers) view things. For example, when police suggest adding a second clerk during "high risk" theft times because it makes sense based on evidence, the convenience store management thinks about how much it will cost. This can be frustrating, but the key is to have an open discussion of the issue and to find middle ground or explore alternate strategies.

Second, there are a number of arguments that the convenience store management may make regarding why crime is a problem at their stores. Police departments can be prepared for these arguments and can clarify or refute them with data. A few examples illustrate this point.

a. Our stores are in higher-crime areas. This can be examined with GIS mapping (see Figure 1).

b. Our stores do not make enough profit to invest in CPTED changes. Most CPTED changes cost little and they are evidence-based (lighting, line of sight, no liquor or beer on the floor). This argument can also be refuted by explaining the disproportionate cost on the police in terms of resources, absorbing calls for service, etc. (not to mention the public safety costs).

c. Our stores have more foot traffic and customers than other convenience stores. This can be refuted with Tax Assessor data on store revenue.

Third, the problem-solving model (SARA) is crucial to understanding the size, scope and causes of the problem. The model leads to the development of sound, defensible responses and assesses their impact. As a result, the SARA model builds an evidence base that can be presented to the convenience store management.

Last, police are limited in what they can accomplish without active partnership from the convenience store corporation (e.g., similar to running on the beach – you can make progress but it is difficult to get traction and you expend a great deal of effort). If the store management decides to not actively cooperate, the police leadership may have to get creative to apply

additional leverage. This can include engaging other law enforcement agencies, using the media, and passing a local city ordinance that imposes certain requirements on stores (e.g., CPTED and staffing).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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