CRIME FILE

Neighborhood Safety

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Your discussion will be assisted by your knowing the history
of neighborhood safety strategies, findings from research
on the role of fear of crime in neighborhood safety, and
findings from more recent research on new strategies for
making neighborhoods safe.
The Problems History Made

The current problems of neighborhood safety are closely tied to the history we have developed. They provide clear targets for criminals in two respects. First, very often an intruder may find no one home and, second, there are few passers-by who can spot intruders.

For the first time in the history of human habitation, large numbers of dwellings are completely unattended for many hours a day. The living percentages of single-person households and of tw-o-or fewer-member families, the smaller average number of children per household, the inability of single-person households and those of two or fewer-member families to provide a flow of information.

Nor is there anything similar to a "local" police officer in most urban and suburban police departments. The most efficient allocation of police resources to the most effective use of police manpower is made in large metropolitan police departments. The organization of police districts in large cities is a major step along the road toward reducing crime of all kinds in the neighborhood. The concept of "neighborhood" police officers is the latest in a series of developments in which urban departments are constantly changing. The most efficient allocation of manpower is a major step along the road toward reducing crime of all kinds in the neighborhood. The concept of "neighborhood" police officers is the latest in a series of developments in which urban departments are constantly changing.

The Causes of Fear

We now know that fear of crime results from many more causes than crime itself. Some kinds of people, and in many kinds of neighborhoods, probably fear crime more than they need to; given their low risk of actually becoming victims. What makes them fearful is seeing things they associate with crime.

The "signs of crime" associated with higher levels of fear are both real and perceptual. The social signs include problems involving customers, drug dealers conducting visible transactions, rowdy teenagers loitering on corners, defenders protecting their turf, disorganized and transient people, and property crime. The physical signs include broken windows, garbage left on sidewalks, abandoned cars, broken doors and glass.

Both real and social signs of crime inflame citizens in the neighborhood and cities. The crime itself is "out of control." Ultimately, disorganized people cannot understand how people feel; they cannot communicate their fears with people who cannot speak English.

And long before serious crime develops, the residents of the streets that are "soft targets" are very fearful. The spread of the Neighborhood Watch concept concept is subsiding. Almost one-fifth of the people responding to a recent national survey said that they participate in some kind of community crime prevention program. Many neighborhoods have police assistance, but they do not lack a program to answer questions.

In the absence of "hard targets," the Neighborhood Watch program is not a success. The program rarely has achieved measurable results in the absence of "hard targets." The program rarely has achieved measurable results. The program rarely has achieved measurable results. The program rarely has achieved measurable results. The program rarely has achieved measurable results. The program rarely has achieved measurable results. The program rarely has achieved measurable results. The program rarely has achieved measurable results. The program rarely has achieved measurable results.

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For the first time in the history of human habitation, large numbers of dwellings are completely unattended for many hours a day. The living percentages of single-person households and of two or fewer-member families, the smaller average number of children per household, and the distance-related rise in the number of single adult heads of households (who are also car owners) together mean that many houses are empty for much of the day for at least 5 days a week. The "lack of crime" is not possible in an elderly climate in a state of emergency for the invention of central heating system again, since someone was always on hand to keep the home "burning." Other technological changes sped the development of this process, such as the invention of household labor-saving devices, but social changes such as mass migration from rural to urban areas were also important.

The second historically distinct aspect of modern neighborhood safety is the low density of residential neighborhoods. Although theorems and computer simulations have recently become popular, single-family detached homes have been the dominant form of housing built since automatons became widely available after World War II. This low density reduces informal "watching" by neighbors on whether or not neighbors are home, since there is so much more movement for each "watcher" to cover. In many suburban neighborhoods, it is possible for a moving van to pull up in front of a house and enter, its contents before anyone sees it, let alone those who are planning to move in.

The rise of unattended spreading-out housing projects such as super-highrises, auto thieves, youthful vandals, and other property criminals. It has little to do with the violent crimes of rape, robbery, assault, and homicide, but it has much to do with how safe people believe their neighborhoods to be.

The modern neighborhood also poses distinct problems for the police. When a community adheres to neighborhood once made it efficient for police and citizens to use their major police force, that neighborhood no longer requires automobiles, and the attitude of automobile driving that has resulted is poor. The cars are often not in good condition, they do not stop when they are stopped, and they do not break their horns and glass. These new defensive measures mean that people are more likely to encounter other people who are defensible.

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This program brought to you by the National Institute of Justice, James K. Stowart, Director. The series produced by WETA/DC through a grant to the Police Foundation.
The cost of the community police station in furnishing石榴s (advised by a local corporation) required police time was substantial. But the demonstrated effects in reducing neighborhood fear of crime were also substantial.

### Personas Contact Patrol

The fear-reduction experiments in Houston sought to increase communication with local residents by having police stop to talk to as many local citizens as possible. One area designated as a test site had reportedly received very little police attention, and not even routine police patrol. The police started to drive through the neighborhood on days and hours with pedestrians, thus creating a visible presence. They also sent out the message that special officers had been assigned to that local area who wanted to know about area problems.

This Houston program suffered some of the same problems as the Minneapolis "Cop-of-the-Block" effort. While a number of officers were assigned to the task, one officer alone accounted for about half of all recorded contacts. The other officers made very few personal contacts with residents or shoppers. Only one-third of the households had any personal contact with the police over the evaluation period. At some point, all of the officers in the program felt "burned out" and found it difficult to continue making cold contacts with citizens. But for all the problems, a substantial amount of contact was made.

The impact of this contact was impressive: the prevalence of households victimized by crime was reduced by almost one-half; the level of fear declined substantially; and residents' attitudes on other local issues improved. While some methodological problems with the research make these results more suggestive than conclusive, these strongly suggest personal contact patrol is an improvement over routine, anonymous policing.

Police in Newark, Brooklyn, and other places have adopted similar strategies and have received much favorable public comment. The crime reduction effects may not hold up in other evaluations, but the public approval will probably be more consistent. Survey research shows a broad desire of public support for police, if only the police will exploit it. In doing so, they may not only enhance the "image" of the department, they may also help residents feel safer as they ought to, and work harder to make the neighborhood safer for crime.

### Environmental Design

The Crime File film and this commentary are about police and community organizing approaches to making the neighborhood safe and neighborhood residents less fearful. A different, "environmental" approach to achieving these aims involves efforts to change the physical layout of neighborhoods. Examples include redesigning streets to make them more public or turn them into cul-de-sacs, adding street lights, or designing buildings in ways that make it possible to keep an eye on the neighborhood. Although the results of such efforts have been mixed—for example, improved street lighting has had no consistent impact on crime—there have been some successes in reducing crime. The best test was in the Asylum Hill area of Hartford, Connecticut. Between 1976 and 1979, the layout of streets and intersections was changed to make more one-way streets, cul-de-sacs, and "gateways" in residential blocks. The changes reduced the amount of outside traffic and increased citizens' efforts to watch the neighborhood. A short term reduction in crime was noticed, but there was no lasting reduction. The program did seem to forestall economic deterioration of the neighborhood where it might otherwise have occurred.

Comprehensive efforts to improve neighborhood safety will probably include both organizational and environmental elements.

### References


### Discussion Questions

1. Do you know any police officers who work in your neighborhood?
2. What specific ways do you know about how and what kind of crime occurs in your neighborhood?
3. How much "watching" goes on in your neighborhood? How many hours a day is the neighborhood empty?
4. Do you know your neighbors? Would they ask questions about a moving van emptying your house?
5. Does fear of crime affect your shopping habits? Your recreation? Your property values?

This study guide and the video on Neighborhood Safety was produced by the Police Foundation to provide background material for use in community discussions. For information on how to obtain these or other police research products, contact CRIME FILE, National Institute of Justice/National Institute of Justice, 780 17th Street, NW, Rockville, MD 20852.