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April 1989, Volume 58, Number 4

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U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice

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**FBI Law Enforcement
Bulletin**

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Law Enforcement Bulletin

United States Department of Justice
Federal Bureau of Investigation
Washington, DC 20535

William S. Sessions, Director

The Attorney General has determined that the publication of this periodical is necessary in the transaction of the public business required by law of the Department of Justice. Use of funds for printing this periodical has been approved by the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Published by the Office of Congressional and Public Affairs,
Milt Ahlerich, Assistant Director

Editor—Stephen D. Gladis
Managing Editor—Kathryn E. Sulewski
Art Director—John E. Ott
Production Manager—David C. Maynard

The Cover: Federal and local law enforcement personnel work together to combat the urban drug epidemic. See article on page 1.

The FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin (ISSN-0014-5688) is published monthly by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 10th and Pennsylvania Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20535. Second-Class postage paid at Washington, DC. Postmaster: Send address changes to Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, Washington, DC 20535.



Operation Pressure Point An Urban Drug Enforcement Strategy

By
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Police Department
New York, NY

Illegal drugs have racked this Nation, and in particular, its inner cities. New York City is no exception. In fact, the Lower East Side of Manhattan, NY, became euphemistically known as "the drug supermarket of the metropolitan area." This occurred because of certain conditions which contributed to flourishing and highly profitable drug transactions. These conditions were a combination of socioeconomic and

demographic factors which attracted an inordinate number of drug dealers and users to the area. For example, it was not unusual to see over 100 customers queuing up at a particular site to buy drugs.

A number-one priority of the police commissioner when he took office was to rid the city of all drug-prone enclaves, starting with the Lower East Side. Accordingly, a multifaceted, law enforcement program code-named Operation

Pressure Point was formulated. This operation would become the most comprehensive law enforcement effort undertaken by a municipal agency to deal with a specific problem.

The plan called for a two-pronged attack. Phase I, the Enforcement Phase, consisted of proactive enforcement of highly visible, uniformed patrols in the most blatant drug-prone segment of the target area. These patrols

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Captain Carroll

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The principles of Pressure Point are applicable whether a community has a small drug problem or a major epidemic.
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worked in tandem with Narcotics Division plainclothes teams. As each area became stabilized, the units moved on to the next designated area, leaving a small force behind to prevent a recurrence of drug activity.

Phase II, the Neighborhood Involvement Program, was implemented when the entire target area was stabilized and the community demonstrated confidence in the police effort. This phase was designed to stimulate the community to take an active role, in conjunction with the police department, in reclaiming its neighborhood from the drug dealers and users. It involved intensive police-community interaction, education and training for the residents, especially the youth, and a unique referral process for the many resident drug addicts.

Before the operation began, however, extensive groundwork was necessary to prepare all who would be affected by this highly ambitious law enforcement effort. The first step was to alert the entire criminal justice system. Meetings were conducted with the

District Attorney's office, the State's Special Narcotics Prosecutor, the U.S. Attorney's office, the criminal courts, and the Corrections Department. The purpose of these meetings was to solicit their cooperation and input and to advise them of the police department's enforcement strategies and of the impact these strategies would have on their agencies.

Next came the community. We used press releases and the media to publicize the program and to inform residents of a special telephone number to report drug violations. Community leaders were informed of our goals and were asked to help form the nucleus of phase II—the Neighborhood Involvement Program.

The final step in the preparation stage involved defining the roles of all enforcement personnel and providing intensive training and instruction. During the instruction, we explained the overall purpose of Operation Pressure Point and established necessary guidelines to ensure its success. We also emphasized police sensitivity and empathy for a com-

munity that had been besieged by a drug epidemic for a long time.

PHASE I: ENFORCEMENT

Target Area

The target area encompassed 74 drug locations within 3 precincts where illicit drug trafficking was most destructive and which seemed impervious to previous enforcement efforts. These locations became posts. We then determined a priority order to direct our main police attack at those locations. A large task force of uniformed police officers began the operation by saturating and sealing off a small segment of the target area. Vehicular and pedestrian traffic was prohibited except for those with legitimate reasons (to enter a residence or business, etc.).

Our strategy was systematically to drive dealers to other sites, making them more vulnerable to arrest. First, combinations of uniformed and plainclothes officers, aided by police dogs, entered the “vacant” buildings and flushed out both dealers and users. This also made those entering the area to buy drugs more susceptible to arrest. Second, as each designated block became secure, we stationed uniformed officers there to prevent a recurrence of drug sales.

Next, the Housing and Preservation Department sealed up these vacant buildings which had served as havens for dealers and addicts alike. The Department of Sanitation and the Department of Traffic then removed debris and derelict autos. In addition, we towed and impounded those vehicles which were identified as being owned by scofflaws. Fi-

nally, teams of uniformed officers assumed proactive roles while on patrol.

These teams dispersed large groups, prohibited congregating at known drug locations, and actively enforced vehicle and traffic laws in order to discourage drug buyers from entering the neighborhood. Automobiles with out-of-state license plates were particularly scrutinized,¹ because many times the potential buyers in these automobiles were robbed, and in some cases, killed for their drug money.

While each block was being recaptured from the addicts and dealers, the neighboring parks and playgrounds were also being returned to the citizens. Mounted officers, assigned to the parks, patrolled visibly. This high visibility had a very positive effect on the local residents who frequented the parks. They now felt very safe because of the police visibility and because drug transactions were no longer rampant. Even parents could now enjoy these facilities with their children without danger and harassment from "junkies" and derelicts.

Each day, citizens' confidence in the police improved. During the first 2 weeks, Operation Pressure Point personnel averaged 79 arrests per day, 31% of which were for narcotic sales or possession.

A special hotline was set up in the command center to handle citizens' drug complaints. At first, the community was very apprehensive about calling this number to report drug violations because

Table I
OPERATION PRESSURE POINT
Phase I: Enforcement Activity

| | <u>1984</u> | <u>Inception to June 1988</u> |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Arrests (all) | 11,041 | 36,247 |
| | (3,183 for felony sale of narcotics) | (9,038 for felony sale of narcotics) |
| Summonses | 45,081 | 125,668 |
| Contraband Seized | | |
| Total Value | \$3,082,835 | \$6,995,516 |
| U.S. Currency | \$542,053 | \$1,528,079 |
| Vehicles | 113 | 299 |
| Firearms | 161 | 501 |

Crime Complaints (Target Area)

| | <u>1983</u> | <u>1984</u> | <u>1987</u> | <u>83 v 84</u> | <u>84 v 87</u> |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| Murder | 55 | 20 | 13 | -63.6 | -35.0 |
| Robbery | 1,348 | 714 | 798 | -47.1 | 11.8 |
| Burglary | 1,024 | 644 | 657 | -37.1 | 2.0 |
| Grand Larceny | 1,162 | 787 | 558 | -32.3 | N/A* |

*Value which constituted the crime of grand larceny in 1983 was over \$250. Amount increased to over \$1,000 in 1987.

of the fear of reprisals and lack of confidence in the police. Slowly, perceptions began to change. During the first year of operation, the command center received 1,249 telephone tips. In 1987, over 5,200 tips were received, and the first 6 months of 1988 reflected a 28% increase in calls over 1987.

A fleet of at least six marked radio patrol cars was made available each tour to respond to reported street conditions. Because all uniformed and plainclothes personnel were on the same radio frequency, Street Narcotics Enforcement personnel or Narcotics Division undercover officers could be dispatched to locations requiring a more surreptitious approach for success. These phone tips provided vital intelligence information about the movement of dealers and about drug activity which enabled the task force to adjust when dealers moved out of the target area.

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During the first 2 weeks, Operation Pressure Point personnel averaged 79 arrests per day....

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We also established new, special posts and increased our efforts to prevent any new drug operations from becoming entrenched in new locations. When police response could not solve a problem, usually involving a business establishment, the Pressure Point base called upon a municipal task force of inspectors from the Buildings and Health and Environmental Protection Departments to

carefully inspect such locations for existing violations.

Operation Pressure Point so disrupted previously entrenched operations that dealers changed distribution hours, changed drug “brand names” (to make police think they were out of business), moved operations completely, and in some cases, installed an additional level between the street addict and themselves to avoid detection.

We had to adjust accordingly. Uniformed and plainclothes personnel were assigned to off-hours, and arrest teams were positioned to intercept both the dealers and buyers as the drugs were distributed.

Uniformed personnel dispersed groups of addicts and prevented them from reorganizing. This, in turn, forced the lower-level dealers (often addicts supporting their habits) to sell on the street. When this happened, “buy-

and-bust” operations were employed with much success. These buy-and-bust operations employed a team of Narcotics Division personnel consisting of a lieutenant or sergeant and five police officers. After making a buy, the undercover officer would signal other backup officers. The uniformed officers would then move in to make the arrest. This

way, the team stayed intact to continue the operation.

Federal Day

Another innovative attack against the drug dealers involved special prosecution which became known as “Federal Day.” Once a week, officers of the New York City Narcotics Division would charge those dealers arrested that day with violations of Federal statutes instead of State law. Those arrested were then turned over to the U. S. Attorney’s office for prosecution. This collaborative effort between Federal and State prosecutors to “cross designate” and prosecute drug cases added a new and potent deterrent to drug dealers.

Supervision

One of the operation’s most important features, and a primary reason for its continued success, was the indepth monitoring and supervision provided at all levels of execution. A deputy chief was assigned as project director to oversee and coordinate the entire operation. An inspector was assigned and assisted by the duty captain to monitor patrol activities and oversee the efficient operation of the command center during each tour. The command center, in turn, was supervised by a lieutenant who coordinated the activities of all the assigned supervisory patrol personnel.

The Narcotics Division personnel were directed by a captain, and each team was overseen by a lieutenant. No narcotics unit could be assigned without the physical presence of a sergeant at all times. Complementing the supervision performed by ranking officers in

the field were the Office of Chief of Patrol and the Inspections Division, which also provided daily supervision of the overall staff.

The Command Post

The heart of the operation centered around the command post office. From here, the project director coordinated the activities for all the law enforcement and municipal agencies involved. Daily briefings were held here, all statistical data and intelligence information were also gathered here, and the movement and placement of all police personnel were controlled from here.

Officers at the post also maintained and monitored a recidivist file of all those arrested. This file greatly assisted identifying and tracking drug dealers and putting pressure on the courts to deal effectively and speedily with such repeat offenders. The file also provided information which helped other units, such as the Homicide and Robbery Squads, to solve open cases.

The command post also staffed and supervised a mini central booking facility specifically for Operation Pressure Point arrests. This was not only cost effective but also reduced the number of civilian complaints, corruption allegations, and prisoner suicide attempts.

Results

From January 1984 through December 1984, Operation Pressure Point personnel made 11,041 arrests. These arrests, most of which were drug related, also freed the streets of robbers, thieves, and murderers. In addition, they issued some 45,000

summonses for traffic and Administrative Code violations, most of which were drug related. (See table 1.) This tremendous enforcement activity substantially decreased major crime not only in the target area but also in the surrounding precincts.

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From January 1984 through December 1984, Operation Pressure Point personnel made 11,041 arrests.

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This operation also gave credence to a Justice Department study which found that 79% of people arrested for serious crime tested positive for the recent use of illicit drugs.² It is quite clear that if a city has a major drug problem, its serious crime rates will be high. Thus, it follows that a substantial reduction in drug trafficking should bring a concomitant relief in serious crime, especially homicide, robbery, burglary, and grand larceny.

As of June 1988, Pressure Point personnel had made 36,247 arrests, over 9,000 of which were for felony sale of drugs. This averaged to 25 arrests per day, up from the average of 16 per day realized after the first year of operation. (See table 1.) This increase can be attributed to the current crack epidemic and the increased involvement of the Chinese in the heroin market.

Thus, phase I came to an end. Law enforcement accomplished what it had set out to do: Neutralize rampant drug trafficking in the neighborhood and make it a more viable place to live.³

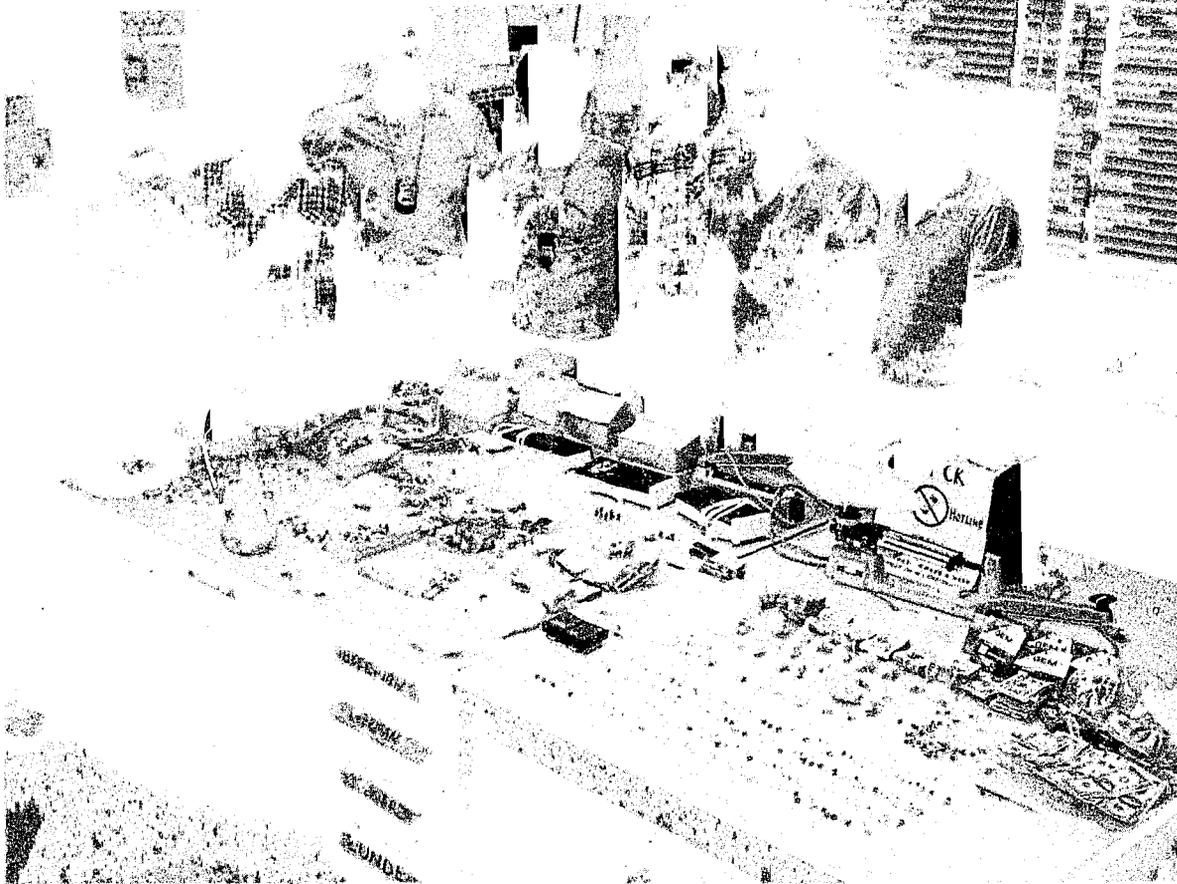
It was now time for phase II: The Neighborhood Involvement Program. The police department had accomplished all they could on their own. Further inroads would have to involve substantial input by the law-abiding residents of the Lower East Side.

PHASE II: NEIGHBORHOOD INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM (NIP)

Publicity Campaign

Before our joint venture with the community was formally announced, we began a publicity campaign. In cooperation with law enforcement, a citizens' group designed a flyer which explained how to report drug violations to the anonymous hotline number. This flyer was printed in English, Spanish, and Chinese and distributed throughout the community by volunteers. In addition to the flyers, volunteers also placed posters advertising the Operation Pressure Point hotline in most of the businesses throughout the community.

The hotline was linked directly to the command post rather than headquarters to provide rapid response and continuity within the community. All calls were anonymous and logged in for dispatching and tracking purposes. Just 1 year prior, this would have been unthinkable for these local mer-



Members of the NYPD Narcotics Division display contraband from a recent raid.

chants because of the fear of reprisals from the drug dealers.

Community Affairs Officer

To get the most out of community contacts, the number of community affairs officers in each precinct was doubled. This enabled the officers to initiate community meetings and to organize and recruit residents for the Auxiliary Police, the Block Watchers Program, and the tenants associations more effectively. This highly successful Community Patrol Officer Program (CPOP) was put in place in the targeted precincts. In addition, configuring the CPOP beats to conform with Pressure Point posts enhanced community contacts and improved drug-related intelligence gathering. The CPOP officer provided residents with a personalized contact through which they could voice their concerns. These officers,

working with the ad hoc committee, educated and encouraged tenant associations to actively prohibit drug dealers and addicts from using their buildings.

Officers instructed tenants to report all building violations which were conducive to drug

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... coordinated
enforcement
efforts ... will set the
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degenerative trend....”

trafficking and strongly encouraged landlords to fix locks and secure entrance ways. Officers also fostered vestibule and hallway lighting and urged tenants to identify apartments where drug trafficking was taking place.

School Program

The police department, in cooperation with the New York City Board of Education, also mounted a unique program which added impetus to phases I and II of Operation Pressure Point. The School Program to Educate and Control Drug Abuse (SPECDA) began in September 1984, and employed a dual-track approach to fighting drugs.

The enforcement part of SPECDA focused on school perimeters in the target area. Those arrested for selling drugs within 1,000 feet of a school were processed under Federal law. SPECDA also was highly successful in closing down virtually every “smoke shop” in the area, and eventually, the entire city.

The educational part of SPECDA was aimed primarily at the preteens in grades five and six. However, an assembly program

was also designed to reach the older students. SPECDA educational goals were to provide factual information about drug abuse and to provide training which would encourage healthy attitudes and behavior among those children who were highly susceptible to the drug culture.

Recover Hotline

Probably one of the most innovative and unique programs initiated by the police department was a nonenforcement approach to reduce the addict population on the Lower East Side. This was a slightly radical departure from a strict law enforcement point of view because it considered that drug abuse, aside from its criminality, was a disease which was not cured by incarceration. Police officers, together with the community, designed a program to provide addicts with alternative lifestyles. Because this program offered hope for a new and productive life to the substance abuser, it was called Recover.

A special telephone line was established at a "self help" community center within the target area. The telephone line was manned 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, by recovering addicts. Addicts needed only to dial the letters R-E-C-O-V-E-R and someone from Addictions Anonymous provided them with referral information and immediate counseling if necessary.

The police printed the Recover telephone number on business cards in English, Spanish, and Chinese and gave the cards to community representatives for distribution to local addicts. The

police officers assigned to the central booking facility also distributed these referral cards to arrested addicts waiting transportation to court. Each day, the community center would also dispatch a counselor to the booking facility to advise addicts about the program and provide hope for recovery.

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As of June 1988, Pressure Point personnel had made 36,247 arrests....

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"Self Help" Community Center

This center played a major role in phase II by providing a support network not only for the substance abuser but also for the abuser's relatives and friends. In addition, the center took a proactive stance in providing sensitivity training for police officers and providing information on local drug dealers. Aside from assisting the police and substance abusers and their relatives and friends, the center also fostered community education through workshops and counseling by recovering addicts.⁴

Epilogue

The Lower East Side still has its drug problems, especially with the evolution of the cocaine epidemic, and more specifically with its byproduct known as "crack." The area, however, has made a complete reversal from the one which was drowning in drug trafficking several years ago. The crime problems were greatly reduced, and the neighborhood was returned to the community.

Pressure Point personnel still patrol the area, and many police-community programs are ongoing to prevent a recurrence of the drug infestation which nearly destroyed this neighborhood.

Many of the strategies employed in Operation Pressure Point have been applied and used on a smaller scale in other parts of the

city where drug problems exist. Precinct commanders are now successfully addressing local drug problems by incorporating Pressure Point concepts into their enforcement programs. The principles of Pressure Point are applicable whether a community has a small drug problem or a major epidemic. And, coordinated enforcement efforts, coupled by meaningful police-community alliances against drugs, will set the stage for reversing a degenerative trend in a small localized area or an entire precinct. **FBI**

Footnotes

¹During the first 4 weeks of operation, 18% of those arrested were out-of-city residents. This figure dropped to 14.2% after 6 months of enforcement.

²Peter Kerr, "Crime Study Finds Recent Drug Use In Most Arrested," *New York Times*, January 22, 1988, p. 1.

³Table I shows that major crime has not increased significantly from after the first year of operation (1984) to 3 years later (1987).

⁴For a more comprehensive description of the center's programs, write to: All Craft "Self Help" Community Center, 23 St. Mark's Place, New York, NY 10003.