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Operation Cleanup  
Community/Problem-Oriented  
Policing in Fullerton

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## Operation Cleanup: Community/Problem-Oriented Policing in Fullerton

The launching of "Operation Cleanup" in the summer of 1990 marked the Fullerton Police Department's first major venture into the area of community and problem-oriented policing. This approach incorporates a number of strategies which differ from the usual method of policing the community, and which have, thus far, proven very successful.

For many years, the Fullerton Police Department, like most police agencies in this nation, has been primarily "incident-driven" in its approach to law enforcement. Under this concept, police activities are aimed at resolving individual incidents and calls for service as they occur. The primary goal in incident-driven policing is to invoke the criminal justice system - i.e. arrest or the threat of arrest. The problem with this approach is that it tends to deal with symptoms only, and does not address underlying problems.

Problem-oriented policing is based upon the premise that reacting to calls for service is only the first step in law enforcement, and that the police should go further to attempt to find a permanent solution to the problem which created the call.

The theory behind problem-oriented policing is that underlying conditions create police problems. These conditions can include the characteristics of the people involved (offenders, potential victims, etc.); the social setting in which these people interact; the physical environment in which they live and work; and the way in which the public deals with these conditions. The approach also requires citizens to become involved in identifying priorities for their community.

A problem created by any single or combination of these conditions may generate one or more incidents. While stemming from a common source, these incidents may appear to be different - i.e., social and physical conditions in a deteriorated apartment

complex may generate burglaries, acts of vandalism, intimidation of pedestrians, etc.; however, they are all symptomatic of an underlying problem, and they will continue as long as the problem which creates them persists.

It was a desire to eliminate the underlying problems that prompted the formation of "Operation Cleanup."

The first target area was relatively small - just two square blocks comprised entirely of apartment complexes in the 300 and 400 blocks of West Valencia Avenue and West Avenue. The residents of this area are on the lower end of the economic scale, and are primarily hispanic and southeast Asian. Many are very recent immigrants to the U.S., and speak little or no English.

Although small, the area accounted for 1,107 calls for police service from January 1987 through June 1990. Also during that period, 441 arrests were made in the area on a variety of charges, many of which were narcotics violations. As a result of those narcotics cases, 46 "local" dealers were identified as either living in the area or dealing there on a regular basis. Narcotics activity in the area had become so blatant that patrol officers wearing only a jacket over their uniform shirt actually made purchases of drugs and then arrested the offenders.

From a physical standpoint, the area was considered the worst in the City. Many of the apartment buildings had deteriorated to the point where they fell far short of health and safety codes. Trash bins were overflowing (primarily due to the high density of people in the area), and gang graffiti and activity were highly evident. Broken windows, leaky plumbing, and abandoned cars were the norm.

To tackle the problem, a task force was initiated consisting of representatives of the Police Department, Fire Department, building division, maintenance department, Community Services Department, and the City Manager's Office to develop a plan for the area. After numerous meetings, the task force established the following goals:

- 1) Stop the physical deterioration of the neighborhood, and improve its physical condition.

2) Reduce crime, especially sales of narcotics, as well as reduce calls for police and fire service.

3) Address the need for community services in the neighborhood, recognizing that whatever changes were made would be short-lived unless the social problems of the area were also addressed.

4) Begin a periodic newsletter, printed in both Spanish and English, to inform residents of the progress of the program.

To aid community acceptance of the program, contacts were made with church leaders, school officials, and neighborhood leaders to explain "Operation Cleanup" and gain their support. In addition, community meetings, conducted in both English and Spanish, were held to inform residents of the program and its goals.

Once the goals were established, the task force identified a number of steps that would have to be taken to accomplish the goals. One of the first steps was to identify all property owners in the area and notify them of the city's intent to require correction of all substandard conditions and code violations. A community meeting was held to explain the program to the owners.

Following the meeting, systematic inspections began of all properties in the area, and letters were sent to owners notifying them of violations found. The inspection team consisted of city code enforcement officers, building inspectors, and fire inspectors. Once repairs were completed, all properties were reinspected to insure compliance.

Another step in accomplishing the goals was to have the city's Maintenance and Operations Department inspect and repair all city-owned property in the area - i.e., streets, curbs, sidewalks. In addition, street sweeping was increased from once every two weeks to every week, and trash collections were increased from once weekly to twice a week.

The first step toward accomplishing the crime reduction goal began with instituting daily police foot patrols in the area. In addition, the Police Department entered into

an agreement with the Orange County District Attorney's Office that, as a condition of sentencing, narcotic violators arrested in the area would not be allowed to return the neighborhood. This condition gave officers the ability to arrest these suspects for probation violation if found again in the area.

The Police Department also entered into an agreement with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service to initiate formal deportation proceedings on any narcotic dealers arrested in the area who were not U.S. citizens.

Next, the city began an aggressive graffiti removal program in the neighborhood. Help in this area was received from Sigma Pi Fraternity at California State University at Fullerton. As a community service project, the fraternity volunteer to remove graffiti in the target area. This effort, coupled with the city's efforts, has resulted in a considerable improvement in the graffiti problem in the neighborhood.

To achieve the goal of addressing the area's community services needs, a community center is being established on a donated lot in the heart of the neighborhood. The center, which is being financed through the city's Community Development Block Grant Program, will provide information and referral services in such areas as job skills, health issues, driving and insurance laws, and language proficiency skills.

While still in its infancy, "Operation Cleanup" has produced encouraging results: After the first six months of the program, 84.4 percent of the residents polled indicated a positive opinion of "Operation Cleanup," with only 9.57 percent indicating they were not satisfied with the results. Slightly more than 3 percent responded that they had noticed no significant change.

The crime reduction efforts are more than paying off, with dramatic decreases noted in all categories of offenses, particularly violent crimes, which have been reduced 70 percent. Children in the neighborhood, once fearful of police officers, now follow them as they patrol their beats through the neighborhood. Adults are also more open with the officers.

So confident has the city become of the promise of "Operation Cleanup" that it has been expanded to two additional problem neighborhoods - the 2300 block of West Baker Avenue in west Fullerton, and the area around Topaz Lane, on the east side of the city - and additional applications of the program are being studied. While it is too soon to comment on the results of these new efforts, success is anticipated.

What can be stated with certainty, however, is that "Operation Cleanup" has proven that neighborhood/problem-oriented policing can be a valuable tool in a city's efforts to provide safe, quality environment in which to live and work for all its citizens.