



# Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy

In the Department of Criminology, Law, and Society



## Seattle Police Case Study

[What Works in Policing?](#)[Review of the Research Evidence](#)[Seattle Police Case Study](#)[Resource Library](#)

As a case study, the [Seattle Police Department \(SPD\)](#) provided short descriptions in March 2014 (below) of how their practices aligned with the literature and ideas in effective policing. We updated the links and materials in Spring 2018, except for those concerning SPD. We hope to receive updates from SPD in the future. Visit the [Review of the Research Evidence](#) page to learn more about what works in policing.

The Seattle [Office of City Auditor](#) also has a number of reports and audits relevant to policing and [public safety](#) in Seattle including:

- [Special events – police staffing and cost recovery](#) (2017)
- [Reporting plan for Navigation Team](#) (2017)

- [Five recommendations for evaluating Seattle's new police oversight system](#) (2017)
- [Review of hate crime prevention, response, and reporting in Seattle](#) (2017)
- [Seattle Police Department overtime controls audit](#) (2016)
- [Ten things the City of Seattle should consider when evaluating a pilot implementation of an Acoustic Gunshot Locator System](#) (2016)
- [Juvenile domestic violence in Seattle: Understanding the problem and how best to address it](#) (2015)
- [Seattle Police Department overtime controls audit](#) (2015)
- [Audit of the Seattle Police Department's public disclosure process](#) (2014)
- [How can Seattle crime analysis rise to the next level?](#) (2012)
- [Addressing crime and disorder in Seattle's "hot spots": What works?](#) (2011)

## WHAT WORKS?

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### Hot spots policing

While SPD has not incorporated hot spots policing department-wide, in 2013-14 it utilized two Directed Patrol deployment models that focus on crime hot spots and place-based policing:

1. The first model is focusing on density hot spots of street segments with high volumes of calls for service. The greatest success has been in the downtown business core. The West Precinct, which includes the downtown business core, [undertook efforts](#) to more extensively use officer uncommitted time (i.e. time not being spent on 911 calls or other assigned activities) to patrol high crime street blocks. Based on the Koper Curve Principle (see the [hot spots policing](#) page), officers were expected to visit the highest crime street blocks for about 15 minutes at a time between calls for service. *The Seattle Times* [praised](#) these efforts as a "good move" and preliminary results suggested these hot spot deployments were successful in reducing crime.
2. The second directed patrol deployment model is based on probability hot spot locations of property crime. Property crime makes up approximately 70% of reported crime throughout the city. These efforts are utilizing predictive analysis from [PredPol](#), a predictive policing software used by the Los Angeles Police Department. It is still too early to judge any successes in this program, but the department plans to monitor the effectiveness of this software. See more from the [SPD Blotter](#).

The department also launched [SeaStat](#) in 2014 to use data and analysis to quickly identify crime hot spots. SPD provides all slides presented at each SeaStat meeting. GovEx completed a [case study](#) of the SeaStat approach in 2016.

## Problem-oriented policing

A problem-oriented approach to policing has been selectively utilized in SPD, but it is not used as a department-wide strategy. In 2010, the Safer Union Project arose from the work of a Drug Market Initiative operation (see below). A coalition of community organizations, neighborhood groups, and various city departments came together to discuss and lay out a plan of action. Through their efforts, over a span of time, this intersection was transformed into a viable center of social and retail activity. These efforts were detailed by the Seattle Office of City Auditor in a 2011 report entitled “[Addressing Crime and Disorder in Seattle ‘Hot Spots’: What Works?](#)” (see pp. 21-22).

A problem-oriented approach to juvenile crime hot spots in the West Precinct from 2013-2014 [was evaluated](#) by George Mason University under a grant from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services. This innovative initiative is one of the first to combine problem-oriented policing and hot spots policing in an effort to focus on street blocks where juvenile crime is especially prevalent. Although the police achieved several successes, there was no overall effect on crime in the hot spots. However, the project revealed key lessons for police leaders and jurisdictions seeking to implement community policing, including the importance of organizational support and training for community policing efforts.

## Focused deterrence strategies (focus on high-rate offenders)

The Drug Market Initiative (DMI) is a focused deterrence strategy that has been used three times in Seattle. The Seattle Police Department, in collaboration with the Seattle Neighborhood Group, launched an initial Drug Market Initiative along 23rd Avenue in the Fall of 2009 (see more from [The Seattle Post-Intelligencer](#) and the [Seattle Neighborhood Group](#)). As part of the program, low-risk drug dealers in the area were told during a call-in meeting that they had the opportunity to avoid the criminal justice system and receive services and treatment if they gave up drug dealing. If they continued dealing, they would be arrested and prosecuted.

A second Drug Market Initiative was conducted in Columbia City in early 2011 (see coverage from [The Seattle Times](#)), and a third was conducted in 2013 in the International District. DMI I had 32 participants, DMI II had five participants, and DMI III had two participants. While there was initially no evaluation component of the project, Seattle Neighborhood Group (SNG) is currently working with researchers from Arizona State University and Southern Illinois University on a post-project assessment.

In addition, the Seattle Police Department and other neighboring law enforcement jurisdictions have partnered with the King County Prosecutors Office to focus efforts to obtain exceptional detainment and sentences for known, high volume offenders. The program started with offenders of vehicle thefts. This area was ranked as one of the highest areas for vehicle theft. Once repeat offenders were targeted in the criminal justice system the rates of repeat offenders started to drop off and thus the vehicle theft rate in King County has dropped markedly. The program has now been expanded to include burglary.

The Seattle Police Department is also participating in a program for low-level drug and prostitution offenders called [Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion \(LEAD\)](#). Like, DMI, LEAD tries to link offenders with treatment and services, but unlike DMI, LEAD is focused on low-level offenders who can be immediately diverted from the criminal justice system into services after arrest. If these offenders complete the intake process for services, charges will not be filed (see more from the [COPS Office newsletter](#)). An evaluation of the public safety impacts of the program sponsored by the Ford Foundation is ongoing with a [number of reports](#) released in 2016. The evaluation overall suggests a number of positive outcomes from LEAD, including reduced recidivism and criminal justice system costs. A process evaluation ("[Seattle's Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion Program: Lessons Learned from the First Two Years](#)") was completed by the University of Washington in March 2014.

### **Directed patrol for gun violence**

The Seattle Police Department committed to increasing patrols in areas known to have gun violence. These areas were identified starting in 2012 via a density map of documented incidents where gun violence occurred. Calls for service of "shots fired" that did not result in an incident report were not included. Patrol officers and specialty units supplemented the regularly assigned district officers to proactively patrol these areas. There are a few anecdotal reports where these supplemental officers were in the right place at the right time to prevent and arrest potential armed suspects before they were able to use their guns. In other instances officers were able to take suspects into custody immediately after their guns were used. To date, the department has not conducted a full evaluation of their directed patrol for gun violence efforts.

If PredPol is found to be successful for predicting the location of property crimes (see above), the software's algorithm may also be used to determine locations of probable gun violence.

## DNA for police investigations

The Seattle Police Department has a “three-tiered” approach to collecting evidence—including DNA—in criminal investigations. For serious felony cases (e.g., homicide, sexual assault, robbery) or cases with complex or extensive evidence, the Department has a squad of highly-trained Crime Scene Investigations (CSI) detectives, supervised by a sergeant, and equipped with cutting-edge tools for the processing of crime scenes and the collection, storage, and transportation of evidence—to include DNA evidence (or items that likely contain DNA). For other cases which require some additional expertise, patrol sergeants may call upon an Evidence Technician—a trained patrol officer who has volunteered for extra training and who carries some specialized equipment for evidence collection. Evidence Technicians can be found throughout the patrol force, across all five precincts and three watches. For all other cases, officers and detectives are trained and well-versed in the basics of evidence collection and preservation.

## WHAT’S PROMISING?

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### Information-gathering interrogation approach

The Seattle Police Department is highly sensitive to ensuring a constitutionally sound approach to interrogations that minimizes any chance of false confessions. SPD utilizes a variety of interrogation techniques. It is most accurate to characterize the approaches used by detectives as a hybrid of both information gathering and accusatorial approaches. Most detectives alter how they blend these two approaches depending on the extremely variable circumstances found in each particular crime and with each particular suspect.

### Community policing and procedural justice

Although SPD has a dedicated squad of officers at each precinct to work on long-term issues with various community groups, there is no standard approach to their work. These [Community Police Teams](#) (CPT) focus on determining the root cause of the problem, identifying effective strategies, and utilizing multiple resources to find long-term solutions. As the CPT website describes about the officers working on these teams, “It is their job to know the residents in troubled apartments, to recognize by sight, the “regulars” who congregate on the corner, and to understand the ongoing problems and concerns of neighbors and businesses. Residents and business owners get to know and trust the officers, making it easier to work together to resolve and prevent problems. CPT is about understanding ongoing issues that go back weeks and months and taking steps to prevent problems before they arise.”

Additionally, SPD has developed [Micro Community Policing Plans](#) to customize police services by neighborhood, based on call data in conjunction with public safety concerns raised by citizens. The department has partnered with [Seattle University](#) to survey residents in each micro community about their biggest public safety concerns. A final report on the surveys and implementation of the plans [was released](#) in 2017.

SPD has also explicitly focused their [School Resource Officer](#) program in middle and high schools on student engagement and minimizing the use of arrest. A 2015 process evaluation by Gill et al. suggested the program was well positioned to build trust in students.

Finally, in the area of procedural justice, a recent evaluations by [Owens et al. \(2016\)](#) examined the impact of SPD's brief procedural justice training program for officers working in high crime areas or likely to be in a problematic event. The brief debrief with a supervisor, which focused on the LEED model (listen and explain with equity and dignity), was associated with a reduced likelihood of the officer making an arrest and using force in the weeks that followed.

## CCTV

Seattle City ordinance prohibits SPD from using video surveillance of public areas unless the department has obtained a search warrant or has an active criminal investigation. Although, SPD does not typically make use of CCTV as a crime prevention tool, the department does use CCTV footage from businesses and other organizations to investigate crimes, particularly retail thefts.

## WHAT DOES NOT WORK?

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### Standard model policing tactics:

–Random preventive patrol: The department is transitioning toward using a data-driven approach to deployment. While random preventive patrol still remains one patrol approach in Seattle (just as in almost every major city), the department is committed to more innovative patrol strategies to develop a

“world class scientifically driven approach to deployment and crime fighting.” These efforts will include real-time crime mapping software and additional training for crime analysts, as well as a greater focus on hot spots by crime analysts on hot spots. Analysts will work to quickly relay information about hot spots to front line officers. As noted above, the department has already made efforts to increase its focus on drug, juvenile, and property crime hot spots.

–Rapid response to 911 calls for service: SPD’s Neighborhood Policing Plan adopted in 2008 focused on responding to emergency calls for service in seven minutes or less any time and any place within the city. Rapid response has not been strongly linked to suspect apprehension in prior research, although rapid response is useful in certain emergency situations. Importantly, the Neighborhood Policing Plan also focused on what police were doing in between calls for service and the plan’s website called for “an aggregate of no less than 30% of patrol time available for proactive work on chronic neighborhood crime and safety-related issues.”

–Mandatory arrest: Washington state has a mandatory arrest law for misdemeanor domestic violence cases. Officers in the SPD must arrest if there is probable cause to believe an incident of domestic violence occurred in the past four hours (see more from the [Municipal Court of Seattle](#)).

## **Second responder programs**

SPD does not use any second responder programs of the type that have been rigorously evaluated. However, SPD utilizes multiple Victim Support Teams (VSTs) to respond to incidents of domestic violence while the police are still on-site during the evening hours. At the scene, these teams offer immediate services to victims and their families. The task of VSTs is to assess and ensure the safety of the victim, provide victims with information about services offered and assist in developing a plan to access these services. VSTs provide the victim with a wide range of information about such matters as protective orders, court, legal aid, battered women’s shelters, and counseling services. This program thus differs from standard second responder programs in that victim support is offered almost immediately. To date though, there has been no evaluation of the effectiveness of VSTs.

## **Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.)**

SPD previously had a dedicated squad of D.A.R.E officers but have discontinued this approach based on studies showing the limited effectiveness of the program. The department ended the program in 1996 because of a belief that the \$250,000 spent a year could be better allocated on more effective programs (see coverage from [The Seattle Times](#))

## WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW MORE ABOUT?

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### Broken windows policing

A grant-funded ongoing City research evaluation to address hot spots of juvenile crime in the Rainier Beach neighborhood. Learn more about the project at the website of [Rainier Beach: A Beautiful Safe Place for Youth \(ABSPY\)](#). Although this project is community-led, SPD is an active partner in this partnership and participates in crime prevention activities.

This project is utilizing research-informed, [place-based interventions](#) that include changes to the physical environment. The Center for Evidence-Based Crime Policy has led the program evaluation efforts and a number of reports are available on the [ABSPY Data page](#).

### Increasing department size

The size of the department and SPD's span of control was determined through the Settlement Agreement process.

### Investigations by detectives

The use of proactive investigations by SPD detectives is primarily determined by the subject matter of the investigation. The Seattle Police Department uses its property crime detectives in a traditional follow-up role where the crime is first reported to patrol officers and the cases are then assigned to detectives by a supervisor if there are sufficient solvability factors.

Detectives in non-property crime units, such as Gangs, Narcotics, Vice and Organized Crime, have a much greater opportunity to use proactive techniques, such as the development of informants to combat crime. As described on the [SPD website](#), detectives in the Narcotics Pro-Active Squads, for example "are responsible for investigating narcotics offenses by developing confidential sources and through undercover investigations. Detectives in this assignment are highly motivated and are responsible for initiating their own investigations, whereas most other detective units conduct follow up work on crimes that have already occurred. Detectives initiate investigations based on information received from a variety of sources including patrol officers, community members,



confidential informants, and other law enforcement agencies. The primary focus of the pro-active unit is directed towards mid-level drug dealers operating throughout the city. Investigations can range from arresting street level dealers and shutting down a nuisance drug house, to long term investigations that dismantle complex drug trafficking organizations.”

### Counterterrorism strategies

The SPD has adopted an “all-crimes,” approach to counterterrorism where resources are devoted to combating not only terrorist attacks, but also related crimes that support and facilitate terrorism, such as identify theft and weapons violations. In doing so, the department has adopted the National Counterterrorism Strategy of disrupting, dismantling, and defeating terrorism by participating in multi-disciplinary, public-private partnerships, such as the Seattle Joint Terrorism Task Force and the Washington State Fusion Center.

### Police technology

SPD utilizes technology such as vehicle license plate readers, predictive policing software (see above), vehicle mobile data computers, dashboard cameras, facial-recognition software, and other technology as it becomes available.

The Seattle Police Department suspended its drone program in February 2013 and returned the department’s two drones to the vendor (see coverage from [The Seattle Times](#)). At the time, the mayor released a statement noting the department decided to focus resources on public safety and community policing as opposed to the drones.

In addition, SPD began a pilot project to evaluate the use of body cameras in 2016 with rollout of cameras to all officers starting in 2017 and continuing into 2018 (see more on SPD’s [Body Worn Video](#) page).

Seattle Police car image courtesy of [Mrkoww](#).