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# Big data meets crime fighting: Seattle police launch SeaStat to quickly pinpoint ‘crime hotspots’

BY JOHN COOK (<https://www.geekwire.com/author/john/>) on September 17, 2014 at 8:33 pm



Can big data help reduce crime? Photo via Shutterstock



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People are using data to help analyze elections, stocks and sporting events.

Now, the Seattle Police Department — under the direction of newly-appointed chief Kathleen O’Toole ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathleen\\_O'Toole](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kathleen_O'Toole)) — has launched a new program called SeaStat that’s attempting to use data to help wipe out “crime hotspots” across the city. The program also includes community reports of incidents.

A recent test of SeaStat led to additional patrols in the Capitol Hill neighborhood, which has seen an increase in crime in recent months.

“The department, as part of SeaStat, is drilling down into the numbers to get real-time information on murders, assaults, burglaries and other serious crimes to help identify emerging trends,” the police wrote in a blog post on Wednesday (<http://spdblotter.seattle.gov/2014/09/17/seastat-what-is-it-and-how-are-police-using-it-to-disrupt-crime-trends/>).

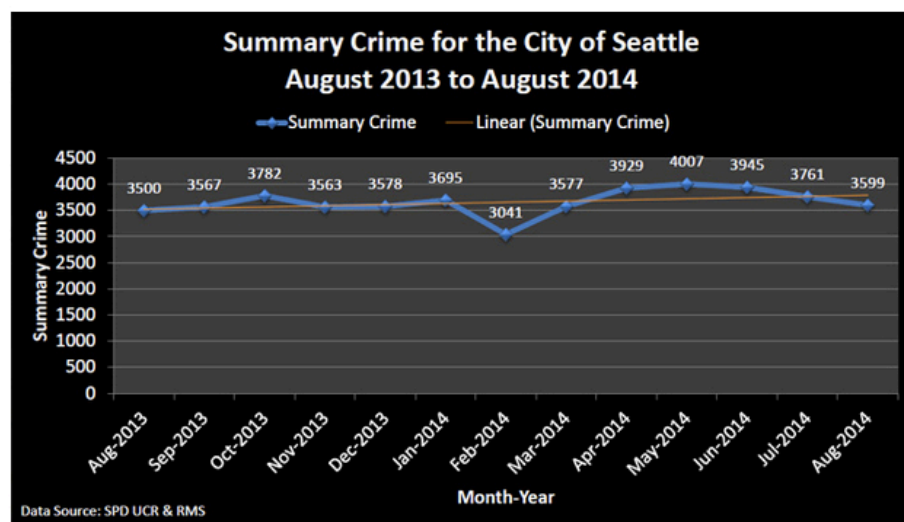
Seattle Police Department Chief Operating Officer Mike Wagers said they’ve “identified the trends and are working hard with our many partners to reverse them.”

Programs such as SeaStat also have been launched in New York and L.A., often referred to “Compstat” — shorthand for computer statistics. In L.A., the technology attempts to use predictive analysis to forecast where crimes may occur.

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Predictive policing is just one tool in this new, tech-enhanced and data-fortified era of fighting and preventing crime. As the ability to collect, store and analyse data becomes cheaper and easier, law enforcement agencies all over the world are adopting techniques that harness the potential of technology to provide more and better information. But while these new tools have been welcomed by law enforcement agencies, they're raising concerns about privacy, surveillance and how much power should be given over to computer algorithms.

SeaStat appears to combine both old-fashioned community input with new-fangled data analysis, and Seattle PD tells us via Twitter this evening that PredPol is a different system that “similarly uses data to put officers where they can be most effective.”



“The aim is to use the SeaStat process to quickly tackle problems as they’re detected,” the department wrote in today’s blog post. “The regular meetings are intended to help department staff assess if solutions are working, and develop other strategies if they’re not.”

Michael Wells, executive director of the Capitol Hill Chamber of Commerce, said in the post that combining community concerns with data analysis is a smart move, providing a powerful “one-two punch” that’s already resulted in arrests (<http://spdblotter.seattle.gov/2014/09/07/new-data-driven-policing-approach-coupled-with-community-input-puts-more-officers-on-capitol-hill-resulting-in-multiple-arrests/>).

Even so, according to recent statistics, the Seattle Police Department has some serious work to do. New figures (<http://spdblotter.seattle.gov/2014/09/17/seastat-what-is-it-and-how-are-police-using-it-to-disrupt-crime-trends/>) indicate that crime in Seattle is up 13 percent so far this year compared to 2013 — including a 44 percent increase in car thefts; a 14 percent increase aggravated assaults and a 21 percent in homicides (17 so far this year). Overall, there were 29,554 crimes reported during the first eight months of the year, up from 26,152 during the same period last year.

**Previously on GeekWire:** King County Councilmember wants police to wear body cameras for ‘transparency and accountability’ (<https://www.geekwire.com/2014/king-county-councilmember-introduces-measure-body-worn-police-camera-pilot-program/>)... Q&A: How technology can help police departments, and make officers more accountable (<https://www.geekwire.com/2014/rewind-technology-creates-transparency-accountability-police-work/>)

*Editor’s note: Crime scene photo via Shutterstock (<http://www.shutterstock.com/index-in.mhtml>).*

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