

DISPATCH

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As someone who's grown up in an urban/suburban environment my whole life, I've had two thoughts when flashing lights and sirens go by: *Where are they going? It'll never happen to me.*

Having lived in University District the last three years, the presence of police cars has increased, the incidence of crimes around me have increased, and the amount of people close to me who have been a victim of crime have increased. I wanted to explore this contradiction of removal from the passing police to the growing unease about how safe we really are.

The Seattle Police Department divides the city into 5 precincts. Each of those precincts are subsequently divided into smaller regions called sectors, and then each of those sectors are divided into "beats," denoted by a letter and a number: B1, B2, B3, and so on. These are the areas that individual patrol officers are assigned responsibility for.

The police department has a program called Tweets By Beat, aimed at making it easy to find out about local crime. Each of the 51 beats has a Twitter account, and every time a police car is dispatched to a beat the corresponding account publishes a tweet.

Conceptually, I wanted to use this Twitter data to explore the ideas from above. Visually, I wanted my project to reflect the cultural phenomenon of an older, traditional organization using technology as a 21st century way of communication.

The final result is a wooden map of the city and its 51 police beats overlaid onto 51 LEDs. Starting since midnight of the current day, the map iterates through every hour until the present. A beat will light up during a time step if a police car was dispatched there during that hour (signified by a corresponding tweet), and the colors separate the precincts. The Ballard Fabrication Lab lights up red.

Even though I had been working with the data for weeks, the end result still surprises me. The city is always lit up - some areas more than others - and maybe this is an indication of how unsafe we are. For if there are that many lights, everywhere, all the time, the odds say that one day *it will be you*. But perhaps - there is a better takeaway. All those lights are police officers working around the clock, putting their safety on the line so we can have ours. And that is no small thing.

For the protection of victims, officers, and investigation integrity, tweets are not published until 1 hour after dispatch; I adjusted for this in the project. Additionally, the tweets do not include information about domestic violence, sexual assaults, and other types of crime. See <http://www.seattle.gov/police/tweets/> for more information.

Thank you to the Ballard Fabrication Lab and UW Comotion Makerspace for enabling this project.