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Creative Tactics: From Visual Disruption to Code Enforcement
New ideas from around the country
by Tina McLanus

Creativity and originality are essential in building a successful Community Policing effort against drugs, according to David Carter of Michigan State University's School of Criminal Justice. Carter moderated a plenary session where four police professionals from around the country shared ideas on new tactics and techniques:

- Chief Jay Carey of the Newport News (VA) Police Department - The department is famous for adopting a problem-oriented approach, based on identifying major problems and then developing creative and workable solutions to solve them:
  - Old Buildings that have turned into "shooting galleries" are being torn down.
  - Officers are working with youth in problem areas coordinating job placements.
  - Foot patrol officers actively issue trespass tickets to drug customers.
  - Foot patrol officers act as agents for landlords and owners of drug-ridden apartments to eliminate problem tenants.

Newport News is currently coordinating a program with judges to implement a project that would limit the locations in the community where an ex-offender could go while out on probation or parole. They are also looking into a program to mandate drug testing for those out on bail awaiting trial.

- Lt. Leo Matrangola, Vice Narcotics, Baltimore County (MD) Police Department - The department teams uniformed and undercover narcotics officers together in the CODE (Community-Oriented Drug Enforcement) program which started two years ago. CODE determines a problem area by the number of complaints related to drug crime, open-air dealing, and the degree of fear of crime, prioritizing their efforts into those areas that need it most. They make drug raids and arrests, then the CODE operation moves into the next problem area, but not without a constant evaluation of the area just vacated for at least the next three months. The community relations officer takes a citizen survey to determine what effect the CODE operation had on the community. This
officer also heads FIST (Families Insisting on Safe Tenancies), which encourages landlords to add an immediate eviction clause in apartment leases to rid their units of those who are dealing drugs.

- Chief Robert Wadman, Aurora (IL) Police Department - Chief Wadman said that deterrence as a crime prevention tool is not working - if it were, we wouldn't be measuring our failures by an increase in crime in our cities. He looks at a three-part medical model as an analogy. When a hospital responds to an emergency medical situation, they react in an effective and efficient manner through the use of trained professionals and technology - in a fashion similar to how the police respond to a crime. A trained officer uses technology, such as computer dispatch, to reduce the response time. The second element is prevention. Medical prevention may mean a modified diet. In policing, it may be a Neighborhood Watch group. Wellness is the third component. In medicine, it would include early education about risks, such as the dangers associated with smoking. In policing, it would be quality education for children to improve the quality of their lives, so that crime is less of an option for them. Wadman feels that police are forced to act like a triage unit in a hospital, always responding to the most critical situations, which means there is never time to work on wellness as the long-term solution.

- Chief Gary Leonard, previously of the Alexandria (VA) Police Department - The department approached the five open-air drug markets in Alexandria with creative tactics such as "jump-out" units and spotters with telescopes to identify drug dealers. Uniformed officers stopped and talked with everyone possible in the problem areas to get to know the community and to find out who the troublemakers were. Brochures are distributed in the community to tell the citizens what the officers are doing and how to handle being stopped by the police, so they do not end up in confrontations. Slide shows of officers working in the community are shown to neighborhood groups to introduce Community Policing.

Leonard says that public housing should be the safest place to live, not the reverse. HUD had long and complicated eviction procedures. So Alexandria worked with the agency to develop a quick eviction process for drug dealers. Before the Community Policing Officers were placed in problem areas, the police were definitely not the most popular people around, says Leonard. Once the community got to know the officers, the residents applauded them every time a drug dealer was led away.

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