

Shawnee police use connection between wrecks, crime to lower crime stats

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SHAWNEE, KS (KCTV) -

A connection people might not have considered is helping Shawnee police cut crime numbers.

The idea is to look at where police see a lot of wrecks and where they see a lot of crime. Where the two overlap, they can kill two birds with one stone.

The two elements don't always collide, but they do along a stretch of 75th Street where clusters of apartments and rows of retail make for a high-density strip with lots of people for criminals to target and lots of stop and start traffic causing wrecks.

"We might have a hot spot that comes up that we might need to focus our efforts on for a short time. But we always have the overlying 'this particular area is an area that we'll always be in until the data drives us someplace else,'" said Shawnee Police Capt. Dan Tennis.

The approach was developed by the National Highway and Traffic Safety Administration, or NHTSA, which saw the correlation popping up and proposed pooling the resources of traffic and patrol to saturate the area. The visibility, the concept proposes, works to cut problems on both ends.

It's different from a hot-spot approach because the reallocation of resources is more long-term.

"You can have an officer who's issuing a citation for following too closely because we've had a lot of rear-end collisions at that intersection and, while he's doing that, a car burglar drives by and says, 'you know what, I don't want to break into a car in this area because police are everywhere,'" Tennis said.

To measure results, officials looked at typically crimes ordinarily committed by strangers that happen out in the open, such as property crimes and sexual assaults that equate to getting groped in the grocery store.

In the two years before the approach began, there were 522 such crimes in the target area. In the two years after, the number fell to 420, a 19.5 percent drop. In the rest of the city, using the same categories and timeframe, the numbers went down 6.5 percent. Accidents there went from 197 to 176, down more than 10 percent, compared to 4 percent everywhere else in Shawnee.

And the results are all for not a single extra dollar being paid for extra police or patrolling time.

Police said it will only slightly move the problems elsewhere because studies show that crime displacement's not one for one. For example, for every three or four burglars who decide to go to another parking lot, one will get tired of trolling.

They will adjust the area as needed but, for now, even with the drop in those numbers, the 75th Street corridor between Switzer and Quivira Road and north to the city limits is still the highest when combining total wrecks and crime.

Right now, Shawnee is the only local police department using the model on a non-pilot basis.

Friday, the crime analyst for the Shawnee Police Department will be flying to Australia to do a presentation on the approach for the Australian Federal Police.