

## [Changing the Culture and History of Policing](#)

October 9, 2012 in [Crime Statistics](#), [Featured](#), [Posts](#), [Predictive Policing](#) by [Chief Scott Silverii, Ph.D.](#)



The apple never really falls far from the tree. This remains a truism of policing's reactive paradigm of responding to crime. The tree I'm referring to is England's tithing system begun in 648 A.D. This system included groups of village men (usually 10) responding to the commission of a criminal offense. The group was summoned from the course of their daily routine by a "hue and cry" that beckoned a response to pursue the offender. Upon capturing the criminal, he was turned over to an authority and the group disbanded, returning to individual duties.

Fast-forward a scant 1346 years later to observe today's patrol shift in action. They randomly move throughout a subjectively drawn geographic beat conducting independent police and non-police actions. The patterns they travel or the areas selectively chosen for conducting these random acts of policing don't really matter. That is until the high-band radio cries out an offense in progress, and the non-cohesive actions of a clustering of officers turns into a coordinated response.

Singular in mission and motion, these officers unite for pursuing the offender. Once he or she is apprehended, the suspect is delivered to the local authority and the unit disbands back again into their non-choreographed areas of responsibility. We even still use the horse, domesticated dog, and chase on foot during these actions while remaining close to the historical roots of our enforcement service delivery methods. Although I'm sure even the village idiot would appreciate today's police fleet advancements, whether it's the act of deploying ultrasonic sound to disorient an offender, or throwing a rock from the village cliff, the philosophy of reactive police response remains unchanged from 1500 years ago.

The evolution has been slow to come, but it is coming. Citizens, elected officials, and progressive law enforcement commanders are demanding efficiency and effectiveness from agencies serving as peace keepers and social service providers. As a profession, policing assumes responsibility for measuring levels of crime and perceived effectiveness in combating

that crime. This is a dangerous combination, and is similar to asking the fox to keep a count of the chickens.

Recently, federal grant solicitations to law enforcement are including requirements for partnering with universities while conducting research designs to quantifiably examine the effects of enforcement efforts. This is a giant leap in the right direction. Not because police and quantitative statistics go together like gasoline and fire, but the ecology of law enforcement is entangled with internal performance requirements, external demands and political pressures.

Anecdotal stories and back patting for a job well done does not allow the responsible internal partners and external stakeholders the accurate information specific to the successes of reducing social harms.

Analyzing data using various scientifically rigorous methodologies is the only manner for ensuring that police organizations are conducting their mission conducive to the mandates of the body they serve. Today's police executive handles an array of requests ranging from mundane to the impossible. The expectation that the chief of police is aware of precisely how effective the organization operates without the use of data is unrealistic.

There is a body of expertise in law enforcement emerging from the traditions of "crime analyst" that are evolving from one-time number counters of post-events and activities to a progressive, scientifically based predictive policing professional. The International Association of Crime Analyst (IACA) leads the way for this truly emerging skill. With the use of statistical packages and geographic information systems, analysts provide the fuel for running the data-driven engine of modern law enforcement.

For the past four years I have had the great fortune to travel this country delivering workshops on behalf of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) that offers a progressive system for changing the culture of policing. My former agency participated in the pilot phase beginning in 2008. As the model progressed along with my career, it is entrenched as the cornerstone of the city police department where I serve as chief. A data analyst now replaces the rock throwing village idiot, and intelligence-centered patrol assignments replace randomized ineffective practices of patrolling without purpose.

The concept of proactive policing is known by various names including intelligence-led policing, hotspot policing, predictive policing and selective enforcement. My base of experience is rooted in the data-driven approaches to crime and traffic safety (DDACTS) philosophy. It is a business model, which addresses the efficient allocation of policing resources for the purpose of reducing social harms. Based on the analysis of crash and crime data, agencies affect the occurrence of both social harms with the application of highly visible traffic enforcement strategies.

The correlation of crash and crime occurring within close proximity allows the police executive an opportunity for addressing both challenges with a singular tactic. The use of highly visible enforcement (HVE) sustains a flexible and cost-effective method for reducing these social harms. By placing on-duty officers in geographic locations based solely on the statistical

frequency determined by a micro-place and micro-time analysis, communities may enjoy the benefits of decreases in actual and perceptual fears of crime and victimization.

It is human nature for people to develop patterns of behavior. This tendency toward habitual patterns and place-based victimization provides the foundation for law enforcement to capitalize on the historical routines of individuals as they move through time and location as either victims or victimizers. By mapping multi-year data sets of crashes and crimes, policing agencies begin to see the high frequencies of occurrences for both categories overlay within a jurisdictional map.

Simply put, create a map of crashes over the last 3 to 5 years. Next, produce a map of crimes over the same period of time. Finally, lay one map over the other and like GIS-magic, the hotspots appear. Going a little further, agencies may examine these hotspots to determine the days of the week and times of the day when the highest levels for crashes and crime are happening.

This is where the executives become increasingly interested. No additional expenses are associated with the implementation of the DDACTS philosophy, strategy or tactic. Officers already assigned to patrol are, or should be in these areas anyway. Reallocate their assignment to specifically target the hotspot. This assignment should include the days of the week and hours of the day illustrated through your mapping technology.

Proactive officers with no direction usually end up at internal affairs. These same proactive officers, when provided with a scientifically quantified and justifiable geographic assignment which is based on the micro-place and micro-time data analysis, usually participate in significant reductions of social harms associated with crashes and crime.

A commitment to working smarter vs. harder requires the optimistic leader to leave the traditional reactive policing model of running from one call for service to the next. The “fire brigade” method of extinguishing small fires after small fires is not consistent with efficiently managing the resources entrusted you. By allowing your analyst ( a 27 year old gen-X'er) to geocode CAD and RMS data onto a jurisdictional map, you gain an comprehensive perspective of crime and crash challenges plaguing your agency for years past and to come.

There are numerous relatively inexpensive resources available to law enforcement agencies. My cohort and current president of the IACA, Christopher Bruce, demonstrates that approximately 80% of the tools required for conducting quantitative data analysis are available within a basic Microsoft office suite.

My agency uses an off-the-shelf software, [CrimeReports.com](http://CrimeReports.com) for delivering a web-based mapping capability with public consumption applications. Positioned on our department website, and an accompanying smartphone app, this acquisition also allows for a command central component accessible by every employee for generating series of maps, data charts, trend tracking graphs and other tools capable of making every employee a data analyst.



*Kernel density maps illustrating statistical hotspot before and after treatment.*

The National Institute of Justice provides a free software download for CrimeStat III, and when combined with the power of GIS generates a level of sophisticated analysis promising police agencies the upper hand in battling social harms. These examples are just a few of the unlimited resources available to law enforcement and deliver a mechanism for breaking from the traditions of the reactive tithing system.



*Nearest neighbor hierarchical ellipses map illustrating patterns of crashes in red and patterns of property crimes in blue. Hotspots are identified where the two overlap.*

History is great when teaching about our nation or sharing the customs of one's family and culture. American policing has evolved through the political, the professional, and the community policing eras, and now stands at the horizon searching for the next direction. Never has data been so available to the policing profession. The irony is that we, by trade are documenters of fact, and those facts (data) are held hostage inside CAD and RMS systems. Despite the captured data, we fail to access, analyze, disseminate, and create actionable enforcement items based upon it. In effect, we fail the communities served.

I challenge you to learn from the history of policing, but not repeat it, and explore our fraternal origins of reactive service, but not practice them. As the leaders of our nation's committed and capable officers, I encourage you to consider the application of data-driven practices; to refuse allowing one more shift to conduct directionless patrols; and to stop enforcement activities determined on the intuitive biases of race, socioeconomic or political entitlement.

Do you hear the hue and cry?

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Learn more about this article here:

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