THE ROLE OF POLICE IN CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN

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This paper focuses on the role of police and Australian Police Departments in "Designing Out Crime", in the development of the urban environment and the reduction of urban insecurity. I will touch on aspects of why Police Departments should be involved in the development of the urban environment, and how those departments can be involved in the use of the techniques of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design.

Much effective research has been conducted in many parts of the world during recent times in examining differing approaches to the crime problems of urban areas. The launching of this booklet today, and the bringing together of a group of experts in this field, indicates that our communities are becoming more aware of the importance of the physical environment in the factors which lead to the generating of crime.

This is of course not really a totally new phenomenon. Since time immemorial efforts have been made to resist the enemy by building bigger and better walls, larger and deeper moats, and introducing stronger threats of apprehension and the like.

The development of police forces has been based on the need to provide a group of personnel whose primary responsibility has included the "prevention of crime". This has been pursued by carefully using the presence of the uniformed constable, the detection of offenders subsequent to the offence, and the provision of advice regarding physical and personal security.

These and other techniques have been used to attempt to remove one or other factors which may lead to the commission of offences, that is, put simply, remove the opportunity or the desire/motive. Few of these measures of course attempt to remove the causal factors of crime related to social conditions or individual needs.

Nevertheless, they are, however, valid approaches in the prevention of crime. They should be viewed as part of the community's armoury of techniques to deter offenders and control the incidence of offences, whilst attempting to maintain the freedoms and values of our society.

Police in Australia have not strongly embraced the concepts of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), and the value which it can provide. Where it has been used, it has been somewhat experimental, localised, and not introduced as a total policy initiative of departments. Consideration, however, is being given to its introduction in several of the larger States. Three major questions need to be addressed in relation to police involvement in this area of crime prevention.
Why Should Police Departments be Involved in Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design?

Police should be involved for a number of reasons:

- Police have on-going current knowledge of criminal behaviour which manifests itself in crimes being committed. This knowledge arises in the "micro" sense (reporting of individual offences) and in the "macro" sense (through the collating of offences to establish trends of criminal activity).

- Police personnel often are the only "public officers" attending consistently at locations where offences are being committed, and who have the opportunity to recognise the need for new design and redesign of physical factors influencing the commission of offences.

- Police Departments have over the years been establishing specialist intelligence collecting and collating functions/procedures/systems. These operate at both tactical and strategic levels. They have the capacity to identify trends of crime or other anti-social activity which could be deterred/prevented by Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design techniques.

- Police Departments have been developing specialist crime prevention bureaux to supplement and support local crime prevention initiatives. Considerable expertise has been built up in these areas especially regarding personal safety, home and commercial security and mother anti-crime measures. Policy would need to be developed to decide whether inputs to the community on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design would be made on a centralised specialist basis or on a local basis.

How Should Police Departments Become Involved?

Police Departments should become involved through:

- The provision of a specialist consultant capacity relating to: how offenders commit offences, e.g. offence methods, new offence techniques; examination of plans for new buildings, developments, redesign, redevelopment; and input to planners, council, public housing developers, architects, designers and related specialists of expertise in redesign, siting, lighting, access, target hardening and related information.

- Development of practices and procedures to identify from crime reports and other intelligence sources the locations/situations which are likely to be subject to effective action through redesign.

- Development of systems to enable this information to be subject to action through a co-operative multi-disciplinary or multi-agency approach.

- By ongoing analysis of offences being committed which may be deterred, prevented or reduced in future by CPTED techniques, for example: wilful damage (vandalism); burglary (breaking); crimes of violence including robbery; rape and other sexual assault; vehicle theft; and larceny.
• By devising practices and procedures to attempt to measure the effect of such action by analysis of crime trends and public attitudes (including fear of insecurity), that is, effective evaluation.

When Should Police Departments be Involved?

Using the above approaches indicates valid police input in such circumstances as the following:

• Proposed new housing developments, particularly broad acres, flats and medium density development.
• Proposed redesign for rehabilitation of buildings, housing estates and depressed areas.
• Provision of new shopping centres, public buildings, recreational facilities, sporting venues, commercial/industrial development and upgrading of parks and public places.
• Siting and development of public facilities for adequate surveillance by police and public, for example: facilities for aged; public telephone; public transport facilities (including railway and bus stations); railway overpasses/underpasses; footways/alleyways; car parks; schools; pedestrian malls; marinas, etc.; and public parks, playgrounds and toilets.
• Design and redesign of interiors of buildings/structures to reduce opportunities for crime.

It must be seen that CPTED from a Police perspective is much more than simple target hardening that is, better locks and doors – although that is an integral part of it. CPTED can be an effective technique involving police and many sectors of the community in a co-operative approach to reducing the problem of crime in our communities. It is not the only way to go. It is, however, one valid multi-disciplinary approach to the problem of crime in a free society. It is a method of reducing urban insecurity, and one which lends itself to the extension of the programs of community-based policing being introduced in Australia.

Police departments in a number of overseas locations now view this technique as a valid area for police input. Material from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the United States, the United Kingdom, and from Europe indicates an increasing recognition and use of CPTED techniques and involvement of police in the following areas: development of crime prevention strategies based on environmental principles; development of profile data of the target areas; development of victim oriented approaches which are based on maximising security but relate to both the physical and social environment; and identification of new criminal techniques and activity and use of CPTED and other measures to combat them.

In South Australia, Police have used CPTED and situational prevention techniques in a number of simple but effective ways; for example, the police have been used as consultants: a large metropolitan council engaged a design and building company to produce a large elderly citizens day centre. The building designer/architect, town clerk, local police and police crime prevention personnel met and, using police as
consultants, revised the initial building design, siting, access, etc. This ensured much less opportunity for offenders to commit offences against or within the building and its surroundings. This was achieved without detracting from the aesthetics or utility of the building. The results were cost effective when measured against incidence of crime in the area.

The South Australia Police have also identified areas of need, for example, a numbers of offences of various types were being committed in a large block of medium-density flats, including larceny of and from motor vehicles, trespass, disorderly behaviour, breaking and entering, wilful damage, and other offences. In consultation with the building’s owners and caretaker, simple small changes were introduced which produced large benefits. These included reducing the height of screening walls, increased lighting (new technology -less cost), reducing through traffic, better identification of public and private areas, and diverting foot traffic from certain sections. The results were effective.

A further area identified by the Police was a park which had been the location of several serious rape offences together with other robbery and assault offences. This led to a co-ordinated approach between the police and local government engineers and planners to redesign the creek area in the park, which has led to considerable improvements in the park and a reduction in the opportunity for offenders. Changes used included improved access for police, redesign of the creek banks to ensure better vision for police and the public, thereby improving the probability of offenders being seen, and deterring offenders. The aesthetic beauty of the area was maintained.

Many other situations lend themselves to use of CPTED techniques. Its valid use is only restricted by imagination and commitment. Police Departments in Australia have an excellent opportunity to learn from overseas experience in implementing CPTED techniques as part of their community-based policing initiatives. In a time of economic constraint most CPTED techniques can be introduced without large capital outlays. Provision of personnel on a centralised or decentralised basis to provide a CPTED capacity in identification and/or consultation is essential, together with revised practices and procedures. Depending upon departmental organisation, some CPTED activity may be achieved within existing community-based policing procedures, through local crime prevention officers as "key people", for example.

In the booklet *Designing Out Crime* which is being introduced at this Conference, the following is stated:

The purpose of this booklet is to raise the consciousness of developers, architects, town planners, policy makers and individual householders; to convince them that, whatever the arguments against CPTED, its benefits outweigh its drawbacks, and to give practical advice on preventing crime.

We are not advocating crime prevention through environmental design – a situational approach – as a panacea for burglary, vandalism and assault; we are presenting it as a partial solution, and one that is within the scope of all the major actors. Until such time as a perfect society exists, or until social programs can be devised which reduce the motivation of people to commit
such crimes, CPTED can help make our homes and streets safer (Geason & Wilson 1989, pp. 9-10).

I agree with these sentiments and congratulate the authors for the production of the booklet. No doubt it will assist not only in raising interest, but also in precipitating action in this important area of crime deterrence and prevention.

**Bibliography**


