FROM COMMON SENSE TO COMMON PRACTICE: OUR DECADE OF CHANGE

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**Synopsis**

For many years, consultant planners, crime prevention specialists and university lecturers have promoted a crime prevention initiative called Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) as an effective way of reducing crime opportunities. In Australia, CPTED workshops, presentations, courses and projects have occasionally sparked interest from the planning, design and building professions; often, they have not.

This paper outlines a decade of achievements in relation to the implementation of CPTED in New South Wales. In particular, it profiles the Safer by Design (based on CPTED principles) program, Australian & New Zealand Standard (ANZS) 1158.3.1, proposed changes to the Building Code of Australia and legislative guidelines that require consent authorities to identify and minimise crime risk during the Development Application assessment process.

It concludes by arguing that ‘regulatory change’ has had a more positive effect than expected, stimulating widespread community interest and professional acceptance of CPTED in NSW.

**NSW – The Early Years**

Historically, the community has seen crime and crime prevention as the responsibility of the police and the judicial system. In the past, when a crime occurred or when there was a persistent problem in the community, people automatically turned to the police or judicial system to solve it. This community view may have been realistic when local police knew their local troublemakers and they had strong relationships with their local areas. However, as communities grew and changed, and police and judicial resources became stretched, the limitations of the criminal justice system became apparent. At the same time, the police and judiciary recognised the importance of forming partnerships with other stakeholders in the crime prevention environment.

In 1993 the NSW Police Service prepared a community safety management plan. This plan set out a cooperative approach to addressing the social causes of criminal behaviour, and included the ‘Safer by Design’ program. This program contained both proactive and reactive features, and focused on the relationship between crime and the built environment.

The proactive side of the Safer by Design program was a cooperative initiative involving the NSW Police Service, a number of local councils, state government departments, and some private sector organisations. This involved trained police reviewing the safety and security implications of project designs, planning proposals and Development and Building Applications.

The reactive side of the Safer by Design program focused on assessing existing urban form for crime risk opportunities. It utilised site audits to identify problems or potential problem areas, and to encourage amelioration. Depending on the nature and objective of the site evaluations, two types of audits could be conducted: a Safer by Design evaluation could be completed by trained police or: a community safety audit could be conducted by local residents, shopkeepers, council and members of the business community.

When the New South Wales Police Community Safety Plan was launched, it met with mixed response. Some councils supported it, others adopted a ‘wait-and-see’ approach while others dismissed the concept as a passing fad. Managers at the Manly, Fairfield, Marrickville, Gosford, Wollongong, Waverley and Blue Mountains councils supported the initiative. While these managers were in place, Safer by Design flourished. However, when these managers were promoted, transferred or resigned the Safer by Design program suffered. The Safer by Design program was based on good faith and a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ between police and council managers. The success of the program, in other words, was linked to the support of individuals within councils rather than organisations themselves.
Catalyst for Change

The issue of consent authorities’ involvement in crime prevention was raised in the New South Wales Industrial Relations Committee inquiry No. 1880 of 1995, which investigated the issue of Transportation of Valuable Goods and Assets. This inquiry was headed by Justice Peterson in response to the death and injury of a number of security guards in the Sydney area in 1995. One of the deaths occurred outside a newly constructed shopping centre. The offenders concealed themselves in the fire exit of the new shopping centre, which was located next to an established bank. There the offenders waited for the arrival of the armoured car delivering cash to the bank.

As the security guards got out of their armoured car, the offenders pushed open the fire exit doors and confronted the security guards. When a security guard reached for his firearm, he was shot dead by one of the offenders. The offenders took the money before using the same fire exit, this time to make good their escape through the carpark. This type of scenario occurred at a number of financial institutions throughout Sydney, where the offenders used the built environment to their advantage. The Inquiry looked at a number of aspects involving security guard employment, including training and safety practices. The Inquiry also examined the role consent authorities could have played in possibly preventing some of the crimes. Justice Peterson said,

“I turn now to the relevance of particular locations of delivery and the facilities which are provided therefore in the context of the impact those areas and facilities may have upon the Occupational Health and Safety of car crew members. This raises the question whether there should be amendments to the Local Government Act, the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act or any other legislation, or whether new legislation should be created to ensure that:

1. Shopping centre developers/designers build shopping centres
2. Shopping centre managers manage shopping centres
3. Council supervise, regulate and control development of shopping centres

so as to enhance the safety of workers involved in the transport and delivery of cash and valuables and the public.”

A number of council personnel gave evidence at the inquiry about their assessment of ‘social impact’ and ‘crime risk’ under Section 90 of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act. Asked whether crime risk was considered in the Development Assessment process, some councils said yes, some said no and others did not know as they had not received training in these issues. The inquiry made a number of recommendations, including that a manual be developed to help local councils understand and apply crime prevention.

Interagency Approach

In 1997, the New South Wales Attorney General’s Department together with the Department of Local Government and the NSW Police Service, developed the aforementioned Crime Prevention Resource Manual, which was supplied to all councils in NSW. The manual provided councils with advice on forming partnerships with other crime prevention organisations, CPTED and other resources. Although the manual was distributed to all councils, it was utilised mainly by social planners and community workers rather than staff involved in the planning approval process. During Safer by Design courses, more than 220 planners and 190 police were asked if they had seen the manual. Only five of these replied that they had used the manual. This is another example of an important initiative slowly fading away because it is not ‘required’. Consent authorities, particularly local councils, are under great pressure and must consider a number of legislative requirements. Consequently, optional considerations such as CPTED have been disregarded.
In 1997, the NSW Police Service also underwent a restructure that included the decentralisation of crime prevention from four regions to eighty local area commands (LACs). Instead of four Crime Prevention Officers managing crime prevention at a regional level, 80 Crime Prevention Officers (CPOs) were appointed throughout the State, one at each LAC. One of the objectives for the CPOs was to form partnerships with local organisations to manage crime prevention in a more holistic way. The CPOs were required to complete five core-training areas, one of which was the Safer by Design program. CPOs were encouraged to bring along a planner from their local council to the training course. This had a two-fold effect in that local planners were exposed to CPTED principles, as well as new working partnerships between police and local councils being formed. However, there was a mixed response from local councils just as there was in 1992. Not all attended, while other councils sent junior representatives to assess what the training was about before committing more senior personnel.

**Introduction of Legislation**

In 1999, prior to the Sydney Olympics, the NSW Parliament formed a standing committee on crime. The Deputy Premier and Minister for the then Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, Dr Andrew Refshauge said:

“The NSW Government is moving to reduce crime by encouraging ‘design safety’ in buildings and public places. We will ensure crime risk is assessed during development applications, hold workshops for council planners and seek changes to the Building Code of Australia. Opportunities for crime can be reduced through thoughtful planning, design and space management.”

In April 2001, the New South Wales Government introduced amendments to Section 79c of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act, making it incumbent on consent authorities to consider crime risk when assessing all new development applications. It was from this point that real progress began to be made in NSW in crime prevention through environmental design. It is only after the introduction of these guidelines, together with partnerships and networks formed through Safer by Design training, that consent authorities have truly taken crime risk into consideration when assessing development applications. Not only are local councils working with local police when assessing crime risk but other organisations such as NSW Planning, Roads and Traffic Authority, State Rail Authority and Workcover, are also getting involved in assessing crime risk in major developments which they have carriage.

Is legislating that crime risk be taken into account with all development applications the preferred option? Philosophically, the answer is no, but practically it has proven to be beneficial. The journey has been an evolution, not a revolution. Many of the benefits that are being experienced today have come about through achievements made along the way. However, as our ten-year journey to this point highlights, sometimes progress cannot be made without a little assistance. For decades, private consultants, crime prevention specialists, and university lecturers have developed packages and short courses to promote the principles of CPTED. These courses have been specially tailored to meet market needs, client time frames and corporate objectives. As with early Safer by Design courses, many of these courses had initial impact, but interest faded when CPTED was stacked up against competing interests, legislative requirements and political priorities. As an organisation’s focus, objectives, or staff changed, CPTED seemed to be the constant loser.

Now with regulatory backing, CPTED has gained legitimacy in councils, government organisations, and universities. Organisations have introduced Development Control Plans and policy that are based on CPTED principles. A ripple effect can be seen in ANZS 1158.3.1 that relates to public lighting. New developments are now required to determine crime risk before determining the type
and amount of lighting needed in pedestrian areas. In NSW, a natural partnership has formed between lighting providers and police. Police have developed a crime risk evaluation, which can be utilised to conduct a formal crime risk assessment to identify the level of crime risk in an area. This assessment process has not only been utilised to determine crime risk pre or post development, but it is now utilised by lighting providers to determine lighting levels. The updated lighting standard, together with Section 79C of the EP&A Act, will ensure crime risk is taken into consideration in many projects undertaken in NSW.

The University of New South Wales is now going to present CPTED courses and introduce the subject in more depth in architecture and planning. Again, the ripple effect will ensure even more planners will be exposed to CPTED and crime risk management. To date, 244 Council planners, 195 police officers and 21 individuals from other government organisations have participated in Safer by Design training. Participants from the 30 courses have rated the training at 9.2 out of 10 (average course rating). Post-course surveys also indicate that knowledge and skills gained are both relevant and useful in participants’ day to day work environment.

The introduction of the regulatory guidelines designed to reduce crime risk in developments has had a positive effect in New South Wales, with Planning New South Wales declaring that crime risk will be considered in over 120,000 developments every year, a first for Australia. The Safer by Design program has received widespread positive media coverage in both rural and city areas. Both police and council have utilised Safer by Design in the media to highlight positive advancements by their respective organisations in addressing crime risk. This acceptance has been formalised with the Safer by Design Program first winning the NSW chapter of the Royal Australian Planning Institute’s President’s award for planning excellence, then being nominated for a NSW Premier’s award for excellence. In 2002, the program won the National Royal Australian Planning Institute’s President’s award for excellence in planning.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, regulatory change has had a positive effect in NSW, stimulating widespread community interest and professional acceptance of CPTED. As stated earlier, regulatory change was not the preferred means of bringing about change in New South Wales. However, in the 18 months since the Section 79C crime prevention guidelines were introduced, Safer by Design has progressed further and faster than in the previous 10 years. Police at the local level are now being asked to help councils to assess an increasing number of developments each week. This will further increase as the CPTED momentum continues to grow. This increasing acceptance of CPTED is beginning to see a cultural change occur in organisations such as Council, Workcover, RTA and State Railway Authority, where design safety and crime prevention initiatives are becoming part of work practices.
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