CASE STUDY #2

BACKGROUND READING

JANUARY 2021

Introduction

The city of Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA, is the largest city in the southwestern state of New Mexico. The city was founded by the Spanish in 1706, although there was already a Native American population in the area. The city sits 1,510 meters above sea level and has a cool arid climate.

The population has grown dramatically over the past 50 years, and the current population estimate is about 560,000. The ethnic makeup is 42% non-Hispanic white, 47% Hispanic of any race, 5% Native American, 3% black, and 3% Asian. Married couples comprise 44% of households and 33% of households have children under 18. The median household income is $38,000, the median family income is $47,000. About 10% of families and 13% of all people live below the poverty line, meaning that the government considers them to be poor (Wikipedia, 2020).

Background on Car Theft in the US (excerpts from Keister, 2007)

This Case Study looks at two types of incidents. Vehicle break-in is theft from parked cars. Because insurance companies require a police report before they will pay for damages, these crimes are usually reported to police and constitute one of the most frequent complaints. Other names for this crime are vehicle burglaries, vehicle larcenies, and car prowls.

While generally a more significant problem in metropolitan areas, thefts of cars also pose a significant crime problem in many suburban jurisdictions. Cars are generally stolen for one of three purposes: (1) for temporary transportation, such as use in another crime or for "joyriding"; (2) to strip the car of its valuable parts for resale; (3) to re-sell it, often

disguised as a legitimate car. The vast majority of car thefts are committed for transportation or "joyriding." Stolen cars generate higher insurance costs, inconvenience, and financial losses for car owners as well as the risks to the safety of police officers and other motorists from stolen vehicle pursuits.

Factors Contributing to Thefts of and from Cars on Residential Streets and Driveways

Understanding the factors that contribute to your problem will help you frame your own local analysis questions, determine proper effectiveness measures, recognize key intervention points, and select appropriate responses. Where and when cars are parked are probably the most significant factors that offer opportunity to thieves.

Location

At single-family residences. Because suburban residential areas are relatively safe and quiet, residents can become complacent about car security. They may leave their car doors unlocked or the keys in the ignition. Oftentimes, their homes' exterior lighting is wholly inadequate. Overly tall shrubbery and other brush on the premises can provide thieves with cover. An entire neighborhood filled with unlocked cars and poorly lit homes, with plenty of cover, is an inviting scene for a thief.

On the street. National Crime Survey data indicate that most car thefts (37 percent) occurs on the street outside the victim's home. A study conducted in the United Kingdom revealed that a car parked on the street is much more likely to be targeted by criminals than a car parked in a driveway. Hampshire (United Kingdom) police discovered that nearly one-half of all car crimes in Portsmouth occurred on only about 10 percent of the city's streets and that the pattern was even further concentrated within those streets.

Cars in residential locations that are adjacent to lower-tier socioeconomic neighborhoods (which often have higher crime rates) are generally more vulnerable. Thieves who reside in the high-crime neighborhoods need only walk a few blocks to search for items or cars to steal. They have the advantage of being familiar with the area.

Residential subdivisions. Residential subdivisions surrounded by rural lands and not served by public transportation are less likely to suffer from chronic car crime. Thieves

would have to travel to the location, and then walk around in unfamiliar neighborhoods where they are more likely to appear out of place and attract suspicion. Also, these areas often have no sidewalks, so pedestrian traffic in general draws attention.

Time

Thefts of and from cars in suburban residential areas generally occur at night. This is because it is the time most cars are present in these areas, as well as the fact that darkness provides cover for the thieves. In residential areas that contain multi-family apartment complexes, parking lots can be vulnerable to thefts during the day because there are many people using the lots, thus providing anonymity to the offender. Some special events that draw large numbers of vehicles to an area also generate high volumes of thefts from cars.5

Type of Car

Data on the most frequently stolen new cars and parts are compiled by the Highway Loss Data Institute and the Insurance Information Institute and are published annually online. Data on the theft of older model cars are reported by the National Insurance Crime Bureau. In general, older models of cars are more often stolen than more recent models because fewer of them contain in-built anti-theft devices, and thieves learn that particular models of cars are easier to steal than others. However, newer models may be targeted for theft if they contain expensive components in great demand.

A Ford Mustang stripped of its airbags and other interior components. Credit: www.baitcar.com

References

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