

CRIME PREVENTION AND FEAR REDUCTION  
IN THE COMMERCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Paul J. Lavrakas and Michael G. Maxfield  
Center for Urban Affairs  
Northwestern University

and

Jeffrey Henig  
George Washington University

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When we usually think of the impact of violent crime and fear of crime we most often consider its direct impact, that is, its impact upon the individuals who are victimized. The indirect effects of crime and fear on the commercial sector is no less serious. Owners of department stores, theaters, restaurants, etc., lose money as a result of avoidance behavior by fearful consumers. Other important consequences of fear and avoidance are loss of productivity by urban businesses unable to induce their employees to work late hours. There are costs to the municipal infrastructure as well: Public transit facilities lie idle or under-utilized most of the night, as individuals either avoid the areas serviced by transit routes, or opt for the perceived safety of private automobiles. In these and other ways the providers of commercial and government services suffer direct and indirect losses from crime and citizens' avoidance behavior.

To help stem this potentially escalating cycle The National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice has funded research to prevent crime and reduce fear in the commercial environment. Our presentation will discuss efforts engaged in by elected officials and city employees of Portland, Oregon to revitalize a deteriorating commercial area using a crime prevention through environmental design approach (CPTED). A second part of the presentation follows from the belief of many experts that citizens' fear of crime is out of proportion with their chances of becoming crime victims. To the extent that this is true reducing fear of crime may require separate strategies in addition to direct crime prevention efforts.

The CPTED commercial demonstration site was located in northeast Portland. The target area was a three-and-a-half mile section of a commercial strip divided by Union Avenue, one of the city's major north-south thoroughfares. Prior to the construction of two interstate highways, the Union Avenue business community had been the major commercial area in Northeast Portland. Following the building of the interstates, and the nearby construction of Llyod Center, (which when first built was the largest shopping mall in the U.S.) businesses began to leave Union Avenue. As the area's property values went down, lower-income minority members moved in. Then in 1968 there were riots following Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination. By this time, Union Avenue had developed a reputation as a high crime area and patronage declined, partially as a consequence of fear. Thus the viability of Union Avenue businesses continued to be threatened as consumers turned to the perceived safety of alternative commercial areas. As a result Union Avenue businesses failed or moved out.

In 1974, due to the perserverance of some key persons in the Union Avenue business community, and with the encouragement and support of Portland's mayor and city commissioners, a major revitalization effort was planned with the assistance of a federal contractor, the Westinghouse Electric Corporation. Using the CPTED theory, a demonstration plan was written which recommended changes in Union Avenues' physical and social environments, with the aim of reducing both crime and fear, and thereby increasing the viability of Union Avenue businesses.

As evaluator for this revitalization effort, it was my task to document what environmental changes occurred and to investigate whether these environmental changes acheived their intended goals. From the perspective of CPTED

theory environmental changes are planned to increase access control, natural surveillance, and activity support. To increase the level of Union Avenue businesses' access control, 210 security surveys were performed by Portland police officers under the direction of the CPTED security advisor, Sgt. Gerald Blair; these surveys cost an estimated \$12,500. The surveys indentified security deficiencies at the commercial establishments and made recommendations for improvements. They were performed in February 1976, and followup checks were made six and twelve months later. Our subsequent evaluation, determined that over 60% of the businesses had followed at least some of the security recommendations. We also found a decrease of approximately 50% in the commercial burglary rate during the 20 months following the security surveys. This decrease compared with a drop of less than 10% in Portland's overall commercial burglary rate for the same time period.

The goal of natural surveillance is to make it easier to see what's going on. The major CPTED implementation of this concept was to install high intensity and in-fill lighting along Union Avenue and neighboring residential streets. This cost an estimated \$360,000 and was directed at reducing street crimes. While our analyses did not yield results which were statistically significant there was a definite decreasing trend in the rate of reported street crimes, such as robbery, assault, and purse-snatching, following the installation of the lighting.

The major CPTED efforts to encourage activity support included forming a businessmen's organization, and constructing a "Safe Street for People." To increase the cohesiveness and cooperation within Union Avenues' commercial sector the Northeast Business Boosters (NEBB) was formed in June, 1976.

Support for its operation and maintenance was provided by key CPTED-related personnel. This organization maintained an average membership of 100 throughout 1977, and strongly supported the various CPTED revitalization efforts. Thus it served as an important mechanism for rebuilding the confidence of Union Avenue's business community.

To encourage local residents to use Union Avenue businesses a major side street was designated as a "Safe Street for People." The street was repaved, curbs were offset from the sidewalk which acted to reduce vehicular speeds, sidewalks were repaved with walk-up ramps at curbs, and physical amenities and landscaping were provided both for functional and aesthetic purposes; this was done at an estimated cost of \$190,000. In a few years a housing complex for the elderly is to be built at the west end of this "safe street." The street will then function as a safe and pleasant passageway to Union Avenue stores for elderly pedestrians.

These are the major highlights of Union Avenue CPTED effort. Further environmental changes are planned, and as of the end of 1977 they represented a total commitment of \$10 million. Approximately half of this amount will be spent on a complete physical reconstruction of Union Avenue highway itself, starting in 1979. To date, the results are encouraging. The crime rate has been significantly reduced and the confidence of the business community has been renewed. While the changes in Union Avenue's environment appear to have been directly responsible for these successes it is important to note the role that Portland's elected officials have played in this overall effort.

The CPTED approach requires a multi-agency effort. In Portland the approval and continued support of the mayor and city commissioners provided the political environment that was necessary for the successful planning and

implementation of the various CPTED strategies. Furthermore, the daily commitment and cooperation shown by key staff members, local business leaders, and the CPTED technical advisor was critical. Without their cooperation the revitalization of Union Avenue's commercial environment would have probably stayed at the planning stage.

Despite our findings of reduction in crime and reduction in the business community's fear of crime, our evaluation indicated that local residents were still somewhat fearful of Union Avenue commercial environment. Here is an example of where separate strategies in addition to successful crime prevention efforts appear to be necessary for consumers' fear reduction.

A review of the fear of crime literature suggests that fear of crime is only partially determined by one's objective probability of being victimized, and studies have found that many persons' fear of crime is disproportionate to their chances of being crime victims. Given this, fear reduction strategies can be directed at diminishing the perception of vulnerability and enhancing feelings of safety.

One approach could focus on correcting the misinformation many citizens appear to have about crime. That is, educational campaigns could be waged to make citizens aware that their actual chances of being crime victims are extremely low. In this approach the local media can play a pivotal role by reporting crime stories in a responsible manner. Many scholars suggest that the media do much to feed citizens' fear of crime by their disproportionate coverage of crime-related news stories. Elected officials can strive to remind the media of the responsibility they must assume for the impact of their news stories.

A second direct approach to fear reduction would be to increase the presence of positive symbols in the commercial environment. The more visible symbols of security are, the better. For the sake of an example, very tall,

redhaired policemen could be used to patrol shopping areas with high fear. Their easy visibility to consumers would probably increase perceived security, and thereby reduce shoppers' anxiety about crime. Consistent with this, commercial districts could install emergency telephones, or employ highly visible security guards, not so much because of their potential to reduce crime, but more so because their presence can be reassuring to otherwise fearful consumers. Also, to the extent that visible activities can be planned in the commercial environment which involve women and elderly participants (for example, art and craft fairs), it may be assumed that women and elderly consumers will feel more comfortable and secure while in the presence of these similar others.

A final approach deals with the elimination of negative symbols in the commercial environment. Many people share the stereotype that a dangerous place is dark and unattractive, with potential hiding places harboring threatening young thugs. To the extent that these negative symbols can be removed from a commercial environment, consumers can be expected to regard the area as less threatening. For example, one Union Avenue intersection contained a liquor store where unemployed minority males constantly loitered. This intersection was the one businessmen and local residents unanimously regarded as most dangerous. If these loiters could be engaged elsewhere in some positive activity, pedestrians and drivers along Union Avenue would no longer be exposed to these fear-promoting symbols on a daily basis. In the same way, if a shopping area is well-lit, clean and attractive, with open spaces, consumers will probably be less likely to perceive it as dangerous.

These then are a few strategies that can be tried to directly attack fear in the commercial environment. With some further attention elected

officials and their staff will be able to generate other strategies that may be more suited to their municipalities. The growing literature on fear of crime and citizens' reaction to perceived crime problems is a source which can provide ideas for reducing fear.

In closing, we would like to make one final point, concerning the issue "whose responsibility is a crime-free commercial environment?" Third-party civil suits have recently been filed by crime victims, not against offenders, but against the proprietors and officials responsible for the premises where the crime occurred. Probably the most publicized example here is the Connie Francis suit against a national motel chain for not providing adequate security to prevent an intruder from assaulting her. If this trend continues it appears that the business community may be held legally responsible for taking adequate crime prevention measures on their property. The research that NILECJ is sponsoring may eventually produce a statement on what constitutes reasonable crime prevention standards.

For those of you who would like further information regarding the issues that have been presented here, you may contact the Westinghouse Electric Corporation in Arlington, Virginia to learn more about the CPTED approach, and you may contact us at the Center for Urban Affairs, Northwestern University for other materials about fear reduction, as well as about CPTED.





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