

crime prevention review

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The Burglary Coordinator Program is Working in a Rural Community

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Phillip Summers is a 13-year veteran of law enforcement having held the ranks of sergeant, assistant chief of police and chief prior to joining the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office four years ago. He is an instructor of law enforcement classes at the College of the Siskiyous and holds an AA degree. He is a member of the California Peace Officers Association, California Safe and Burglary Investigation Association, Siskiyou County Deputy Sheriffs' Association, Northern California Investigators Council, Southern Oregon Investigators Council, Law Enforcement Advisory Committee College of the Siskiyous, and is a past member and president of the Morro Bay Peace Officers Association. He has attended POST Middle Management and Supervisory courses, the Institute of Applied Science, and numerous FBI, DOJ and POST in-service training programs.

In July 1976, the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office, concerned with the rising burglary rate, requested and received a three-year grant to analyze the crime of burglary. The program began by the staffing of a full-time burglary coordinator and a part-time secretary. Siskiyou county is comprised of eleven police departments and the county sheriff's office. Siskiyou county is approximately 6,313 square miles, and has a population of approximately 38,000 with resident Siskiyou county sheriff's deputies located in seven geographical locations throughout the county.

HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

A meeting with all the local law enforcement agencies was held to discuss the burglary problem, and it was agreed that all possible information regarding reported burglary would be forwarded to a Burglary Coordinator. All this information would be carded, and a county-wide Modus Operandi (MO) file adopted to be used by all law enforcement agencies. The card filing system selected for the Burglary Coordinator Program was the Instant Data System (IDS cards). In this system each card is numbered around the outer edge (one through eighty-eight, for example). Thus, after a coding method is selected, the cards are notched to correspond to the selected code. A long knitting type needle is used to select the particular card an officer desires to pull from the MO file, the burglary case file, pawn file, or the stolen property file. From the master code file, the officer may select the individual card which meets his needs.

For example, in a recent burglary case the investigating officer asked, "Do we have a burglar who takes small antique items consisting mostly of glass-

ware?" Using the MO file, and searching through it with the knitting needle, a few cards fell from the needle onto the desk. From these, a card matching the MO was located. The following morning after the report was made, the suspect was taken into custody as he was attempting to sell the stolen property to an antique dealer.

Each card is so notched when coded in order that only the desired cards will fall from the needle as it is run through the cards. Using the coding system, each card is broken down into as many categories as is deemed necessary. The cards measure five inches by eight inches and are pre-cut in the right hand corner. Thus, as long as this card is returned to the file with the cut corner appearing on the right, the card may be replaced *anywhere* in the card file system, eliminating the necessity of tedious in-order filing.

Additionally, a color code is used to distinguish burglary cases by the year in which they occurred. This was accomplished by drawing a blue line with a marking pen across the top of all 1976 burglary cases, green lines for 1977 cases, etc. Suspect MO file cards are always additionally identified by a red line.

The burglary case cards are coded so that they will correspond with the MO card coding. In this way, the needle can be run through both the burglary case cards and the MO file cards, and hopefully a "match" will occur. As new MO's are developed, they are then coded, carded and compared to past unsolved burglary cases. Using this system, should a reported burglary case from the past match up with the MO card, the identified suspect or arrested person can be questioned regarding the case.

The results have been an increase in the solving of older cases, and the more frequent recovery of stolen property in these cases. In September 1976, for example, two suspects were arrested for three residential burglaries committed in the county in early 1975. (One suspect was found in New York and the other in Alaska). In February, 1978, using the system, we arrested a juvenile for 16 burglaries all of which were over a year old; fourteen of them had been committed in Siskiyou county and the other two in Redding. Another individual was arrested who was found to be responsible for 5 old burglaries (stolen firearms were recovered in Los Angeles). As this article was being prepared, a suspect was arrested by the sheriff's office, thus solving 6 other burglaries all dating back more than a year. This suspect was already serving six months on another burglary. Remarkably, a coin collection and musical instruments were recovered despite the passage of so much time.

The IDS burglary case cards contain the name of the investigating department, the burglary case number, method of entry into the premises, the type of property taken, evidence found at the scene, the type of premise, geographical area and, when known, the time of occurrence (day, night or undetermined) and day of the week. The system is coded so that cases may be pulled from the system by their geographical area, occurrence within this county or neighboring counties or even southern Oregon.

The cards are also used for obtaining annual statistics. This system, although manually operated, serves the present needs of this county. Using the master list for coding, any of the cards can be pulled from the filing system in seconds.

A weekly report is mailed to each law enforcement agency in Siskiyou county and to the law enforcement agencies in the four neighboring counties. It contains information regarding all reported burglaries in Siskiyou county including the MO, type of property stolen, the jurisdiction reporting the crime, the case number and the officer who is handling the case. The areas to which this weekly bulletin is mailed soon incorporated agencies in southern Oregon which border Siskiyou county. Agencies outside the county forward information regarding cases to the Burglary Coordinator when it is believed the responsables, or suspects, might be transient, or when it is believed that the stolen property is being transported from either Oregon to California or California into Oregon.

A recent case of the Gridley Police Department (a city located about 150 miles from Yreka) is typical of cases in several different agencies. One evening, an officer on patrol identified an individual as having appeared in the Burglary Coordinator's bulletin in past months. The individual had been taken into custody by Gridley officers for a crime committed in their jurisdiction. He had been living in the area patrolled by the officer and had a CB radio in his possession. Through his investigation and interviews with the suspect, the officer became aware the property was possibly stolen. The officer contacted the Burglary Coordinator and, using the stolen property cards, the property was identified as being stolen months prior in a Siskiyou county burglary. A warrant was issued and the suspect prosecuted for the crime. Since the property recovered in the Gridley investigation case could not initially be identified by the victim in Siskiyou county, it could not be placed into the NCIC computer. It was the combined efforts of the two agencies with access to the burglary card system which made the solving of this case possible.

With the excellent cooperation of neighboring California counties and southern Oregon, a pawn file was later incorporated into the Burglary Coordinator Program. This file assisted in the solving of five insurance fraud cases soon after its adoption. In two separate insurance fraud cases, the property had been taken into Oregon and sold by the owners who then fraudulently reported the losses. Working with the Oregon State Police, the property and the second-hand business where the property was sold were located. This was done through pawn slips from Oregon. The property was recovered and the responsables were prosecuted.

Through the information which is fed into the Burglary Coordinator Program from a wide variety of sources, many investigations have been worked jointly between agencies rather than each agency working independently. The information received by an agency makes them aware that there could be a connection with a case they may be investigating, and that a similar or same case is being investigated by another department. Because of similarities noted, the clearance rate soon increased.

RESULTS OF THE PROGRAM AND WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

A study has been conducted of the results of the program thus far. The first year, July 1976 through June 1977, showed that burglaries increased

only 10% in the county over the preceding twelve months. In 1976 to 1977, the clearance rate for burglaries increased by 77% over the preceding twelve months; the arrest rate increased by 38%. The one-year study reflected that 76% of those arrested for the crime of burglary were local residents, thus identifying burglary as being a local problem. It was also noted from the study that only 33% of the victims who reported burglaries could identify their property. As a result, the public is being regularly informed and encouraged to contact their local law enforcement agency for assistance in the marking of their property (or photographing, when appropriate).

It was also learned from the one-year study that approximately 50% of the offenders arrested for the crime of burglary were adults and 50% were juveniles.

Further, a definite relationship was noted between the evidence found at the scene of the crime and the arrest of those responsible. This information has been valuable as a training tool to increase the expertise of the investigating officer as searches are made for physical evidence. The uniformed officer who receives a call to respond to an incident is usually the investigating officer throughout the entire case.

The first year of the Burglary Coordinator Program resulted in the recovery of 31% of the stolen property reported, and there was a 54% recovery rate the second year. The second year data also revealed that burglary decreased by 6%, while there was a 30.5% increase in adults arrested for burglary and a 10% increase in juveniles arrested for the same crime.

In another development, the Burglary Coordinator Program began holding quarterly meetings which were attended by representatives of local and neighboring counties and people from the state of Oregon, in order to discuss local problems and ways to continue to combat crime. As a result, several cases were jointly investigated between agencies in Oregon and California which resulted in prosecutions. As soon as possible after a burglary is reported to the Burglary Coordinator, the information is relayed to all surrounding agencies by either radio or, alternatively, by phone as there are only two teletype systems in the county.

Since the Burglary Coordinator is kept abreast of recent burglaries occurring throughout the county, he is also responsible for the interviewing of the majority of those suspected of burglary, and further interviewing of those arrested for burglary. Whenever a confession or information is received, this information is then forwarded to the agency having jurisdiction. In a recent case, a suspect was arrested for burglary and, following his interview by the Burglary Coordinator, he admitted to a total of 16 burglaries in four separate jurisdictions. This is the time the MO file plays an important role.

Through recent use of the MO file, seven burglaries were cleared throughout Siskiyou county, four of which were safe burglaries. The information concerning the seven cases had been compiled on the burglary cards. The cases ranged in age from one year to almost two years old. A suspect could not be matched to the MO file. Subsequently, through use of the system, it was learned that two suspects in Oregon had been arrested for safe burglaries and a third suspect was suspected of being involved as the one who engineered the crime. Because of a lack of evidence, he was not arrest-

ed. Every detail of that safe burglary, which was committed in southern Oregon, was carded on the MO file card. The safe burglary and the seven Siskiyou burglaries were compared and a match appeared. It was learned that the third suspect was serving time in Nevada for armed robbery. The Burglary Coordinator went to Nevada and, following an interview, the incarcerated suspect admitted to the seven burglaries in Siskiyou county, stating he was responsible for approximately 150 safe burglaries. He had had no prior record of burglaries or of any other felonies.

In connection with the Burglary Coordinator Program, a deputy district attorney was appointed to handle the burglary cases; and, in the period after the program was instituted, July 1977 through July 1978, the Siskiyou County District Attorney's office secured convictions in 100% of the burglary cases brought to them.

The Burglary Coordinator Program is yielding excellent benefits to law enforcement only because of cooperation and good communication between agencies involved with the program, and the cooperation of citizens in Siskiyou county. Through this combined operation and effort of agencies and citizens in northern California and southern Oregon, the program has been viewed as successful.

The Burglary Coordinator Program is now in its third year of funding and operation. The results of the project are monitored monthly by the sheriff's office, and the grant funding institution. The results are greater than those projected. This approach to crime prevention has proven to be beneficial and effective in a rural community.

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