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U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs
Bureau of Justice Assistance

PROGRAM BRIEF

Property Crime Program ("STING")

PREPARED IN CONJUNCTION WITH
REGULATIONS IMPLEMENTING THE
JUSTICE ASSISTANCE ACT OF 1984

98252

U.S. Department of Justice
National Institute of Justice 98252

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FEBRUARY 1985

PROGRAM BRIEF

Information Guide for Police Administrators
and Planners

PROPERTY CRIME PROGRAM ("STING")

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The Property Crime ("STING") Program was initiated in 1974 to penetrate criminal fencing operations through undercover techniques. A 1980 evaluation of the program disclosed that it was highly effective against career burglars, and larceny and motor vehicle theft. The study also concluded that arrests, convictions, and dollar value of recoveries resulted in a substantial return on the initial investment. For example, an investment of \$32 million in 68 "STING" projects resulted in more than 11,900 arrests; an average conviction rate of 93 percent; the arrests of more than 8,900 career criminals; a savings of \$109 million in court costs through guilty pleas; and the recovery of \$398 million in stolen property, most of which was returned to its rightful owners.

I. PROGRAM CONCEPT

Traditional property crime enforcement policies and strategies generally are reactive, attempting to identify and arrest the perpetrator. Although this approach provides service directly to the victim, it results in the management of large caseloads that strain the resources of the enforcement agency and ignores the redistribution system through which stolen property is sold.

The strategy of the Property Crime Program is to proactively interdict the stolen property redistribution system through enforcement and intelligence. Enforcement involves arrest, prosecution, and conviction of criminals within the redistribution system. Intelligence involves the gathering and refinement of information to support further enforcement activities and also to gather information about other crimes.

Using these components, the program:

- Penetrates the stolen property redistribution system under the guise of a fence.
- Expands the contacts and relationships to identify and deal with other fences.
- Penetrates the prime or upper levels of the redistribution system to interdict, disrupt, and destroy the system.

II. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of the Property Crime Program is to disrupt the illicit commerce in stolen goods and property. To achieve that, these objectives must be met:

- Reduce the incidence of property crime.
- Increase the rates of arrest, prosecution, and conviction of thieves and fences who support the stolen property redistribution system.
- Reduce court costs through obtaining and presenting overwhelming evidence.
- Develop intelligence information regarding the stolen property redistribution system.
- Recover and return stolen property to its rightful owners.
- Enhance cooperation and coordination among Federal, state, and local enforcement agencies and prosecutors, and between the criminal justice system and the victims of property crime.

III. CRITICAL ELEMENTS

There are five critical elements in a "STING" operation.

- A. Planning: Prior to designing the specific operation, there must be an analysis of the stolen property redistribution system in the affected jurisdiction. This analysis will be used to select the criminal population against which the operation will be directed, develop objectives of the operation, and determine the type of operation (i.e., stationary, mobile). Analysis also will assist in allocating personnel and equipment and show how to use scouts and informants to penetrate the stolen property redistribution system. Planning also includes the consideration of needed agreements or commitments from other governmental agencies or, if needed, private industry; and, the development of policies and procedures for the operation, incorporating such elements as lines of authority, purchasing and disposal of stolen property, handling of juveniles, apprehension of suspects, and training of personnel assigned to the operation.

- B. **Administration:** Administrative support of the operation is a must. Since the operation is outside normal administrative channels, special allowances must be made. These include a separate evidence management system; special equipment and its maintenance/repair; modifications to fixed storefront sites, if necessary; management of investigative reports, audio/visual tapes, purchase orders, and other documents; and recording the overtime of operations staff and other personnel actions. Administrative support should plan for and be capable of delivering the needed services throughout the operation.
- C. **Security:** All undercover activities are dangerous and vulnerable and this is especially true when contact is frequent between law enforcement personnel and criminals. The principle of "need to know/right to know" must be applied until the operation ends. Concomitant with operations security is the physical safety of the undercover agents. Precautions against unauthorized entry into the physical setting(s) of the operations must be considered. Security procedures also must plan for violent confrontation (i.e., robbery) involving enforcement personnel and criminals.
- D. **Coordination/Cooperation:** The success of a "STING" operation depends upon its ability to provide sufficient evidence to the prosecution for conviction. Therefore, direct and close interaction with prosecutorial authorities throughout the operation is critical. This coordination should be used to produce solid case management, review the legality of enforcement techniques (i.e., electronic surveillance, evidence collection), and thoroughness. Coordination with Federal and other state and local law enforcement authorities will be beneficial and warranted to gain additional criminal information and resources, and prevent potential interference by other enforcement agencies operating in the same area. Private business and organizations, especially if they are the victims of the targeted criminal population, may be valuable sources for information and resources, and could be a critical element in the success of the operation.
- E. **Operations:** The keystone of the program is the enforcement operation which includes penetration, intelligence, evidence, and arrests for prosecution. Operations flow from the combined efforts of planning, administration, security, and coordination/cooperation.

Although the type and techniques of an undercover operation may vary, operations must be perceived by criminals as a part of the stolen property redistribution system and must mix with the criminal elements in that system. Resourcefulness by the enforcement agency, including the use of informants and scouts, is necessary to achieve that perception and acceptance. Operations also must be capable of generating and analyzing criminal information and intelligence in order to penetrate upward into the stolen property redistribution system.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

The conduct of a successful "STING" operation results from thorough planning and should culminate in a project design that serves as a blueprint to shape and administer the effort. The design should include an analysis of the stolen property redistribution system, statement of project goals and performance objectives, project duration, participating agencies and individuals, security considerations, administrative support, training, technical equipment and other resources, mode of tactical operations, project organization, and policies and procedures affecting the operation.

Once planning is completed and resources assembled, the tactical phase begins. First, the credibility of the operation and its personnel must be established with the stolen property redistribution system through the use of scouts and informants. Without this credibility, there may not be penetration into the system. Special attention also must be devoted to case development, avoiding illegal entrapment (a paramount concern), and obtaining and using intelligence. Too often, intelligence is shunted aside for later use. Timely and complete analysis is important to extend penetration into the criminal redistribution system and, if necessary, refocus the direction of the operation. Termination of the project must be planned well in advance. Project personnel must ensure that records of each subject are complete for referral to prosecutorial authorities, sufficient personnel must be available for the arrest of suspects, magistrates must be available, and logistics for staging areas set. In addition, policies and procedures should be developed to address other contingencies such as threats to personal security, premature arrests, compromising the operation due to publicity, and a potential overload of the judicial system because of mass arrests.

V. PROGRAM EXPERIENCES

The results of "STING" operations have repeatedly met and exceeded the investment and commitment of law enforcement. As a proactive enforcement strategy, the "STING" Program makes efficient use of resources to target a large criminal population which could not be achieved through a response-oriented approach. Additionally, law enforcement agencies become more knowledgeable of the criminal redistribution system, its key figures, and its operation. Intelligence and criminal information derived from the program can be utilized for tactical and strategic purposes.

Another benefit is the servicing of victims of property crime whether they be individual citizens, community groups, or private industry. The increased potential for the return of stolen property to rightful owners has stimulated favorable public reaction and additional project resources from the victims (insurance companies, banking/credit card institutions).

A final lesson learned from the "STING" Program is the need to focus on the higher echelons of the stolen property redistribution system. The impressive arrests and convictions of large numbers of "street thieves" are not ends but are means to identify and prosecute major fences within the system. The careful collection and timely analysis of intelligence is essential to penetrate higher levels of the system.

VI. SOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

A. Selected Bibliography

- "Strategies for Combating the Criminal Receiver of Stolen Goods"; LEAA; 1976. *Loan + Materials No. 3077*
- "What Happened? - An Examination of Recently Terminated Anti-Fencing Operations"; LEAA; 1979; NCJ 456732. *Loan + Materials*
- "Taking the Offensive - A Special Report"; LEAA; 1978; NCJ 153008. *Loan + Materials D/CC*
- "Assessing the 'STING' - An Evaluation of the LEAA Property Crime Program"; NIA; 1983.

Some of the above *not yet available - copy satisfaction \$20.50*
are available from: National Criminal Justice
Reference Service (NCJRS)
P. O. Box 6000
Rockville, Maryland 20850
301/251-5509

B. Sources for Technical Assistance

UCLA Police Department
601 Westwood Plaza
Los Angeles, CA 90024
213/825-1491

Chief of Police
Honolulu Police Department
1455 S. Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96814
808/943-3111

Chief of Police
Knoxville Police Department
800 E. Church Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37915
615/521-1200

Chief of Police
Memphis Police Department
P. O. Box 3002
Memphis, TN 38130
901/528-2222

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- "Strategies for Combating the Criminal Receiver of Stolen Goods"; LEAA; 1976.
- "What Happened? - An Examination of Recently Terminated Anti-Fencing Operations"; LEAA; 1979; NCJ #56732.
- "Taking the Offensive - A Special Report"; LEAA; 1978; NCJ #53008.
- "Assessing the 'STING' - An Evaluation of the LEAA Property Crime Program"; NIJ; 1983.

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1455 S. Beretania Street
Honolulu, HA 96814
808/943-3111

Chief of Police
Knoxville Police Department
800 E. Church Avenue
Knoxville, TN 37915
615/521-1200

Chief of Police
Memphis Police Department
P. O. Box 3002
Memphis, TN 38130
901/528-2222

C. Federal Program Contact

Property Crime ("STING") Program
Bureau of Justice Assistance
Office of Justice Programs
U.S. Department of Justice
633 Indiana Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20531
202/724-5974

VII. PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

During implementation of the program described in this Program Brief, sponsoring agencies or organizations should find it useful to track and maintain certain program information in order to provide some indication of program performance. While basic in nature, this information will not only provide an indication of program progress and performance, but will also serve as a benchmark for continued program implementation and allow for comparison with similar program efforts in other jurisdictions. Attached is a suggested reporting form listing several performance indicators which should be helpful in tracking program performance.

PERFORMANCE INDICATORS
(Please type)

Program Category: Property Crime Program
("STING")

Project I.D. No.: _____
(Limited to 10 characters)

Implementing Agency: _____
Address: _____

Report Date: ____/____/____

Period Covered: ____/____/____ through ____/____/____

Performance Indicators: In order to gather basic information regarding project implementation, please provide responses to the following performance indicators.

(1) Total amount of Federal/non-Federal expenditures:

(2) Number of arrests by type of offense:

(A) Theft:

(B) Fencing:

(C) Other:

(3) Number of convictions by type of offense:

(A) Theft:

(B) Fencing:

(C) Other:

(4) Value of property received:

(5) Value of property returned to victims:

(6) Number of fencing operations disrupted:

(7) Additional comments/information:

END