

Criminals Beware: Police Go High-Tech to Fight Crime

Advances in crime-fighting technology are making it easier for police to track down troublemakers and lock them up.

Detective James Miller, spokesman for the City of Albany Police Department (CAPD), says his department has been working for the past few years to modernize technology in order to become more efficient.

E-reporting is one of the new technological techniques that have been put into place. "Officers carry laptops and take reports right at the scene and immediately download the information," Miller says. "From there, it is handled by the crime analysts who map the entire city with real-time data." He says this enables supervisors to determine crime trends more efficiently and use their resources appropriately.

The Eye in the Sky

The CAPD also purchased a watch tower that can be manned and can reach two stories high, Miller says. "It is a mobile tower that can be moved to any location in the city and provides surveillance in high crime areas or where large crowds are," he states.

The CAPD is also using cameras for surveillance. Video cameras complete with audio were installed in police car dashboards so that all interactions between officers and the public can be captured on digital video. Miller says new crime-fighting technology allows his department to be more efficient, because it allows crime to be analyzed in a timelier manner. "The faster you can identify trends and where crime occurs the quicker you can respond to it," he says.

Social Media 5-0

Detective Douglas Orr, who works in the Major Crimes Unit with the Spokane Police Department, says his department uses new technology to examine online chat records.

"The chats are being recorded on a data file that I can resurrect and get back," says Orr, who is also an adjunct faculty member for South University Online Programs. Orr says the availability of high-tech equipment varies according to each jurisdiction. Smaller areas often do not have the funding and resources available to dedicate to new technology. "Smaller jurisdictions still have to deal with electronic crime," he says.

Working in the forensics department, Orr faces some challenges with new crime-fighting technology.

"It's one thing to go and attack computer crime, it's another to seize the suspect's computer and examine it," Orr says.

Orr believes that jurisdiction is a big problem in dealing with modern technology for forensics specialists. "You don't have a lot of agreement of what should be done and how it should be done," Orr says. "One jurisdiction does it one way and one another."

Crime Prevention with Predation

The Memphis Police Department (MPD) uses a high-tech crime-fighting system called Blue Crime Reduction Utilizing Statistical History (Blue CRUSH), says Colonel James Harvey, commander, in the MPD.

"The Crime Analysts use predictive analytics software to analyze past and present information and create multilayer maps of crime 'hot spots' based on various arrests and incidents," Harvey says. "MPD is able to evaluate incident patterns throughout the city or crime trends and connect the dots."

Blue CRUSH allows precinct commanders and crime analysts to analyze an array of data in areas as wide as the entire city or narrowed down to a single block, and that Blue CRUSH has been successful in helping the MPD to fight crime.

"The City of Memphis has experienced a reduction of serious crime by more than 30%, including a 15% reduction in violent crimes since 2006," Harvey says.

Beltway Crime Busters

Lieutenant Nicholas Breul, spokesman for the Washington D.C. Metropolitan Police Department (MPDC), says they use a number of high-tech crime-fighting initiatives.

The MPDC utilizes equipment called Shot Shooter to detect gunshots. This technology predicts where a gun shot was fired from. It also has the ability to distinguish between the actual gunshot and the echoes that occur afterwards. "It is difficult to tell where gunshots are emanating from," Breul says. "This alerts us to gunshots as they're occurring."

"Monitors and sensors are placed all over the city," he adds. "The feeds come into the command center." Breul says this is very useful in helping police find criminals in cases where there has been a shooting.

The MPDC also has a number of closed-circuit television cameras placed in various areas throughout the city. The location of the cameras changes periodically and the public typically receives notification as to where they are currently positioned.

The cameras are not monitored live, but the tapes can be reviewed if a crime occurs in the observed area. "These are very instrumental in picking up evidence. They have recorded shootings and other crimes," Breul says. "They are very effective and help to deter crime."

Click it Then Ticket

In order to reduce traffic violations, the MPDC uses photo radar enforcement.

With photo radar enforcement, cameras detect when a vehicle is speeding, which signals a camera that is attached to the radar equipment to take a photograph of the vehicle. The photograph shows the date, time, speed, location, and license plate number of the vehicle. A speeding ticket is then mailed to the owner of the vehicle.

Some of these cameras are fixed and others are located on police vehicles. The public is given advance notification on the locations of the cameras. In order to monitor traffic, the MPDC uses license plate readers (LPR). The LPRs are stationed on the back of police cruisers. "They snap a picture of license plates going by the police car," Breul says.

An example of this technology's use is if a stolen vehicle is entered in the police database and the vehicle goes by the LPR, an alert will go out. "Without engaging in chases, it can track where stolen vehicles are going," Breul says.

LPRs are also helping in homeland security cases. "Vehicles of concern can be monitored, because we know where the car was and when it drove by," Breul says.

He says there is no doubt that high-tech equipment allows the MPDC to be more efficient. Technologies such as LPRs allow officers to multitask.

For example, he says officers can use LPRs while responding to a call and potentially spot a stolen vehicle on their way, which would be recorded on camera for later use. Some people believe that advanced crime-fighting techniques are an invasion of privacy. To this Orr says, "How much privacy are you willing to give up in order to be secure?"