

Regional Law  
Safety & Justice  
Committee



**REGIONAL LAW SAFETY AND JUSTICE COMMITTEE**

**Thursday, March 31, 2016**

7:30 – 9:00 A.M.

Seattle City Hall, Bertha Knight Landes Room

600 4<sup>th</sup> Ave., Seattle, WA 98104

Theme: Property and Community Crime

**Residential Property Crime and Prevention:** Captain Eric Sano, Seattle Police Department (SPD)

Captain Sano is the commander of the Coordinated Criminal Investigation Section, which includes burglary, theft, juvenile, fraud, forgery, undercover, and long-term narcotics trafficking. This section also includes the Auto Theft Squad, and the Pawnshop/Property Recovery Squad, which are critical elements of the work, particularly in identifying repeat offenders and recovering property.

In the late 1990s, Seattle averaged about 16 thousand auto thefts per year, primarily driven by activity in the North Precinct. This high-density precinct has 250 thousand people and is primarily residential with some businesses. If North Precinct was its own city, it would be the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest city in the state. Auto theft crimes decreased into the early 2000s, however, in August of 2014 auto theft was up again, by 44% over the previous year. By the end of 2015, Seattle auto thefts were down by 30%. How did that happen?

Seattle's high auto theft rate was unacceptable for Chief O'Toole and she dedicated additional resources to reduce it. Through the Major Crimes Taskforce, SPD has brought in additional personnel and focused investigations on property crime.

An important resource for SPD is SEASTAT that uses real time data and anecdotal information to assist in crime analysis and reduction. There are four principles of SEASTAT:

1. *Accurate and Timely Information* – so all officers know what is happening, in the moment. Analysts in SPD headquarters are constantly looking at real time data, processing information and getting it out to officers. As a result, SPD is able to deploy patrols effectively and can plan effective actions.
2. *Effective Tactics* – know what is needed and have a plan. For example, if you want to reduce auto theft, you go after auto thieves. We identify prolific offenders and we go after them. The

unit has only 4 detectives, so we work closely with patrol and parking enforcement. We have automatic license plate readers that are used by parking enforcement that can identify stolen vehicles. King County Prosecutor Dan Satterberg designated special positions to work closely with SPD to ensure that prolific offenders are held in jail. The Department uses social media to distribute messages related to preventing property crime by locking doors, not leaving items visible in vehicles, etc.

3. *Rapid Deployment* – With accurate and timely information and an effective plan, the department can adjust strategy quickly and put plans into action.
4. *Relentless Follow-Up and Assessment* – The unit constantly evaluates what is working and adapts accordingly. Cars with Automated License Plate Readers (ALPR) are in every precinct and used by patrol officers. SPD also has an ALPR car in the Auto Theft Squad, and the Parking Enforcement Unit has 4 ALPR cars. (Captain Sano Comment: This is an incredible tool that I encourage every Police Department to invest in. One ALPR car can locate and identify not only stolen cars but cars wanted in other crimes).

Crime reduction strategies focus on:

- problem locations
- prolific offenders and
- repeat and vulnerable victims.

SEASTAT's operations dashboard migrates data from records management to a platform that is easy to navigate. In addition, Chief O'Toole developed micro policing plans by neighborhood and residents can report crime online. Law enforcement knows who many of the auto thieves and burglars are because they repeatedly come through the system - the same people are committing a wide range of crimes and will continue to operate in areas where they are successful. SPD began to track those prolific offenders, worked with the PAO, and show up to arraignments to hold those persons in jail.

Statistics show a 1% decline in auto thefts this year, but car prowls and burglary are increasing. Looking at the stats, SPD asked why. In interviews with these offenders, they realized that heroin and other drugs are a major driver for these crimes - some people have \$300-\$400 a day heroin or meth habit that they are supporting through crime. SPD is seeing both new faces and persistent offenders and many of these thieves are opportunists. If they see valuables, or even just a phone charger, they will break in. SPD encourages people to leave nothing of value in the car.

Citywide from January through May 10th, SPD has arrested 51 individuals for car prowls. Typically, the window is smashed. All precincts call the major crimes task force to interview these folks, often getting them to admit to other crimes. SPD has posted information and messaging at various hot spots. Online reporting potentially increases the reporting. SPD also sees a lot of car prowls in "secure parking lots" which really aren't that secure, including residential garages and commercial paid lots. Those crimes are counted as residential burglaries in the system, so the numbers are somewhat deceiving. Last night, there were 45 car prowls - a significant number.

SPD formed a property crimes task force – Operation Thiefless in Seattle. Through this operation, year to date, there have been 181 arrests and identification of 160 suspects, 16 of whom are repeat offenders.

SPD can't be everywhere, so prevention is key and smart deployment is crucial.

QUESTION: What happened to the offenders that were not booked into jail ? *Either we're still investigating to ensure that they'll stay in jail or they're now confidential informants.*

QUESTION: With the national reporting system NIBERS – how are the crimes recorded when there are multiple offenses?

*It's a hierarchical system – if someone breaks into 10 cars (in a residential parking garage) it's recorded as 10 residential burglaries. They really are car prowls. In our data we're separating those out to show more detail. The FBI system is antiquated. 93% of residential burglaries are really car prowls. Much of the time, a high number of prowls are at one locations. We've had 19 loaded firearms taken out of cars in car prowls. Some of these car prowlers are working in a regional area – they move up and down the west coast, so they aren't all just drug users.*

QUESTION – What tracking software is available? *Things like TrackMole can track items. I encourage people to write down serial numbers. We find a stack of laptops, but we can't find them reported as stolen.*

QUESTION- I have an emergency bag in my car. Does that make me a target? *Potentially yes.*

QUESTION – What are the demographics of these offenders? *There is no age or race that's typical. It's all across the board. When we look at arrests we almost always recover drugs too.*

QUESTION – Regarding mail theft ... I had an incident at my house that turned out to be young kids. *We have very few resources for under 12 year olds. There's not much can be done. We're not finding many very young kids, but we are finding a lot of high schoolers. Mostly it was for the thrill of it, but it created a lot of problems. When they saw cops they'd speed away creating a real safety hazard. We don't chase cars anymore within the city. for very young kids it is a parental issue, not a police issue.*

QUESTION: I understand in some places they experimented with giving away drugs to reduce crime. What happened with that? *I don't know. I'm not sure if that's a reasonable solution and I don't know how that turned out. No results yet.*

QUESTION: Do you use bait cars? *No we didn't find it to be successful. We keep an eye on problem locations, such as motels on Aurora Avenue. We often find stolen cars in the lots and we'll watch them and make arrests. Bait cars were not cost effective and criminals sometimes could tell something was up. There are other more effective tools.*

### **Community Crime Reduction:** Chief Steve Sutton, Lake Forest Park Police Department

Lake Forest Park (LFP) is a small city and does not have the resources that Seattle has. SEASTAT is a great program and really works, but it's not an option for us. Our strategy is to leverage our communities and our citizens to drive down crime. Lake Forest Park is a primarily residential city of 13,000 residents. The police department consists of 20 uniformed staff, including the Chief, with 2-3 officers on duty 24/7. Geographically, the City is small and officers are able to respond quickly.

The City had a huge spike in property crime in 2014 - driven by heroine and meth addiction. This is a national, not a local problem. Car theft increased by 400% and all thefts increased 12%. In response, the

City created a crime reduction operation to drive down crime and increase citizen awareness. Lake Forest Park's crime reduction focus is on community education to report suspicious activity, and on increasing proactive policing.

Some of the strategies for the Community Outreach focus are:

- *Increasing capacity with block watches* – In 2013 there were only 8 block watch groups. In 2015, the number increased to 45. Lake Forest Park has a community services commission who asked how they could help. The Department looked at the map to determine where the groups should be and the commission went door to door to recruit residents. The Department sponsors quarterly meetings, providing food, to provide information to the community.
- *Communication via social media* – Lake Forest Park became fully engaged in messaging through Facebook, Twitter and Nextdoor in 2015. An initial concern over capacity to maintain communication was addressed by sharing the responsibility. The consistent message is for residents to "Call 911." They are urged to call in if they see something suspicious.
- *Community Partners Emergency Communication System* – Another method of communicating with the community with real-time information about crime and emergencies. Lake Forest Park has over 500 self-subscribed citizens, who really appreciate the information.
- *Night Out Parties* – There were 36 of these in 2015 – and police department staff attended each of them.
- *Engage Police Department staff in the messaging* – The Department equipped all officers with the same message – around calling 911 if a resident sees something –for consistency.

Lake Forest Park is seeing results from these efforts with residential burglaries, auto thefts and overall theft all reduced by significant numbers from 2011 through 2015. This includes 8 burglaries interrupted as a result in 911 calls from citizens. Public service calls are up 35%. Property crime rates are down. the question now is how to sustain it? In part, the answers, at this time, for Lake Forest Park are to maintain the commitment to community communication; to increase awareness, community forums and work with other law enforcement agencies; and to build into future operational plans.

COMMENT: *We are far less siloed than in the past. We need to share information. The criminals don't pay attention to boundaries.*

COMMENT: *Sending blurbs out is great. Getting out funny or good news gets people engaged. If you're in a community block watch criminals know about it and stay away.*

COMMENT: *Tukwila is known for being a high crime area in a small city.*