



PARTNERS IN CRIME PREVENTION

SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2014

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PREVENTING CRIME— LOOKING AT THE SITUATION

You have heard the advice many times:

“Lock your doors.”

“Don’t keep anything in view in your car.”

“Park your car in a well lit area.”

These are recommendations the Sheriff’s Office as well as other local police agencies pass along based on their experience with criminals. They are practical things you can do to protect yourself without going to great monetary expense and that you can incorporate into your daily routine.

These recommendations also come out of crime prevention theories that try to help decision makers pick actions that will reduce crime. Normally we might think of Sheriffs or police chiefs as decision makers in preventing crime. But in the modern world of crime prevention decision makers can include county councils, county departments such as public works, business owners, social groups, and most importantly, you, the citizen in your community.

One theory is called “Situational Crime Prevention” (SCP). It looks at the loca-

tion of potential crimes and tries to reduce opportunities for criminals by:

1. Looking at specific forms of crime.
2. Managing or designing the “environment” in as systematic and permanent way as possible.
3. Making crime more difficult, risky, less rewarding, and excusable to potential offenders.

Situational Crime Prevention doesn’t try to reform the offender, or even find ways to incarcerate the offender. It looks at the environment, whether that be your home, the mall, public places such as parks or public streets and finds ways to discourage potential criminals from conducting a crime.

Much of the recommendations that come from situational crime prevention are common sense, like “lock your doors.” But it gives practical guidance on what we can do to avoid becoming victims.

Usually, we have no direct control over a criminal. But, we can do things that can discourage and dissuade criminals from victimizing us.



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TYPES OF CRIME PREVENTION—WHERE SCP FITS

Situational Crime Prevention is a Primary Crime Prevention technique.

Criminologists describe three types of crime prevention:

1. **Primary prevention:** *Changes the physical and social environment to reduce the opportunity for a crime to take place.*
2. **Secondary prevention:** *Tries to identify potential offenders early to dissuade them from committing a crime.*
3. **Tertiary prevention:** *Measures to work with offenders to reduce or eliminate any future potential for repeat offenses.*

SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION—COMPONENTS

Since Situational Crime Prevention doesn't try to incarcerate or reform criminal, it looks to studies of how criminals behave to focus attention on what we can do to prevent crime.

Three components of the theory include:

- **Routine activity.** This approach says that to have a crime at any time and place you need to have three elements:
 - **A likely offender.** Routine activity assumes that there will be someone who will offend.
 - **A suitable target.** A target can be an object or a person. For a target to be suitable, it must have some value to the offender, must be light enough for the offender to easily take, must be easily visible to the offender to know it is available, and the offender must have easy access to the item, such as a purse that is visible in an unlocked car.
 - **An absence of a capable guardian.** A guardian can be anyone, a homeowner, a neighbor, someone walking down the street who

can take care of a person or property.

- **Rational choice.** Offenders make rational decisions to benefit themselves in some way. A third party, who obeys the law and respects other people's rights and property might not look at these decisions as rational. But, the decisions are rational in the sense that they support the offender's goals (for example getting enough money for drugs) and the offender analyses how he or she will obtain a specific target.
- **Opportunity reducing techniques.** Opportunity is the amount of time or a situation in which something can be done. The goal then is to take away the situation in which a criminal can commit a crime. This takes some understanding of how criminals think and act. But, taking away opportunity is something anyone can do without having to "reform" criminals or go to the effort to catch and hold a criminal for a deputy to take him/her to jail.

There are many targets of criminals. With an understanding of these components, then you can better analyze for yourself what you need to do to protect yourself.

SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION– METHODS OF PREVENTING CRIME

The focus of action under Situational Crime Prevention is to take away the opportunities for someone to commit a crime.

It prevents crime by:

- **Increasing the effort to offend.**
- **Increasing risk of getting caught.** The number one thing that criminals want to avoid is getting caught. They can avoid punishment if they are not caught.
- **Reducing rewards.** Different crimes provide different rewards. Theft often provides goods that can be turned into cash for drugs.
- **Reducing or avoiding provocations.** A provocation is something that might tempt or incite an offender into a criminal act.
- **Removing excuses.** Offenders often rationalize or justify their actions.

Each method tries to dissuade the potential offender from offending at a particular time and place, or from offending at all. They try to manipulate the environs where the target resides and where the offender may operate.

The methods are accomplished by techniques that apply to specific crimes. Some examples of techniques include:

- Increasing effort-
 - Harden Targets– steering column locks, Charley bars, dead-

bolt locks.

- Control access- Lock doors, keep garage doors closed, keys matched to cars.
- Control tools/weapons– Disabling features for stolen cell phones.
- Increase risks-
 - Extend guardianship– Leave signs of occupancy, walk in a group, maintain inventory of valuables, “friends don’t let friends drive drunk”.
 - Assist natural surveillance – Park in well lit area, have front door and windows visible to the street.
 - Strengthen formal surveillance– Install burglar alarm, install cameras, have friend watch house.
- Reduce rewards-
 - Conceal targets– park car in garage, remove valuables from car, place valuables in safe.
 - Remove targets– take cell phone, wallet, etc. out of car, hang up when scammer calls your home.

FOCUS OF MODERN CRIME PREVENTION

Modern crime theories focus their attention on the following factors:

- *Crime, not criminality*
- *Events, not dispositions*
- *Near term causes, not distant causes of crime*
- *How crime occurs, not why it happens*
- *Situations and opportunities that can cause crime*

SITUATIONAL CRIME PREVENTION- METHODS CONTINUED

- Identify property- engrave tools and electronics
- Reduce Provocations-
 - Reduce emotional arousal- controls on violent pornography, enforce good behavior on soccer field, prohibit racial slurs.
 - Neutralize peer pressure- “It’s OK to say No.”
 - Discourage imitation- rapid repair of vandalism and graffiti, “V” chips on TV’s.
- Remove excuses-
 - Set rules- park rules, “park closed at dusk,” “no soliciting.”
 - Post instructions- “No Parking,” “Private Property.”
 - Alert conscience- Roadside speed display boards, “Shoplifting is stealing.”
 - Control drugs and alcohol- server intervention.

How can you use this information? As you look at your home, community, or business, you can use the concepts of situational crime prevention to decide on practical actions that will prevent crime.

Being aware of crime makes you aware of what crimes you need to concentrate on in your community. In this modern age, crimes can emanate from your neighborhood, where you work, where you shop, or even from your computer.

But theories such as situational crime prevention can help you prioritize what to pay attention to without feeling overwhelmed or paranoid.

They can help you decide on the appropriate action to take whether you receive suggestions from the Sheriff’s Office or whether you devise your own measures.

No one method or technique may prevent a crime by itself. But a combination of techniques with multiple groups of people and organizations working to reduce crime will reap rewards for our community

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SHERIFF’S OFFICE CRIME PREVENTION WEB PAGE:

<http://www.snohomishcountywa.gov/289/Crime-Prevention>

NEWSLETTER INFO

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If you have questions regarding this newsletter or any articles that appear in it, please contact the editor at neighborhoodwatch@snoco.org

TIP LINES



Snohomish County Sheriff’s Office: 425-388-3845

Online Tips: <http://snohomishcountywa.gov/303/Anonymous-Tips>

Crime Stoppers of Puget Sound: 1-800-222-8477