

Final Report on the Casey Building Site Crime Prevention Program

Summary Report

crime prevention victoria

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Introduction

Background

A meeting of key stakeholders in mid-2001, confirmed building site theft as an issue for the City of Casey. Crime occurring in new estate developments was seen as a greater problem than 'in fill' building in established areas. In addition, respondents to the Local Safety Survey, conducted by Crime Prevention Victoria, identified household burglary and property damage as crime problems perceived to be most significant in the local area.

The impact of building site theft is considerable, both economically and to the health and well-being of residents. HIA Insurance Services figures indicate that this organisation alone has paid out around \$3 million in site theft claims in the past 18 months, with 85 per cent of builders' claims relating to site theft.

The City of Casey is one of Victoria's fastest-growing municipalities. In 2002, Casey experienced unprecedented growth with more than 80 families moving in every week—or two homes completed every hour of the working week. From 1975 to 2000, 120,000 moved in to Casey and in the first quarter of this millennium, a further 120,000 people will make Casey their home.

Until now, much of our knowledge on the issue of building site crime has been based on anecdotal information rather than systematic investigation. A problem in providing an accurate picture of building site theft is the lack of a specific code on the police incident report. Under-reporting also occurs due to insurance excess levels and potential premium increases.

These issues form the basis for the pilot Building Site Crime Prevention initiative in the City of Casey.

Investigation trends, reporting processes and crime prevention strategies were undertaken during the pilot phase and are reported in this document.

The Project

Project Aims

The aims of the Building Site Crime Prevention Project pilot were to:

- develop and implement appropriate strategies to minimise and prevent such crime;
- identify and analyse crimes that occur on building sites ;
- enhance communication between key stakeholders;
- undertake an assessment of the effectiveness of the project's processes and strategies, and
- disseminate information about the project to interested parties.

Methodology

Project Reference Group

A project reference group was formed comprising key stakeholders. The group met regularly to guide the implementation of the pilot program. An open membership resulted in regular representation from AV Jennings, the HIA, the Master Builders Association, Metricon Homes, the Urban Regional Land Corporation and Victoria Police.

Selection of the Trial Sites

Following discussions with the project reference group, two trial sites in the City of Casey were selected – Kings Park at Narre Warren South and the Lynbrook Development at Lynbrook.

Methodology cont.

In making these selections, a number of factors were taken into account. Both sites presented different problems and issues with regard to site vulnerability and management and co-ordination of new strategies.

The Kings Park Stage 5:

- included one developer/builder;
- was easier to monitor and co-ordinate initiatives; and
- in located an isolated and vulnerable location.

The Lynbrook Estate Stage 8:

- had one developer;
- 24 different builders; and
- included active Neighbourhood Watch Group and Residents Action Group and limited access and egress.

Both of the trial site were being developed from “slab”.

Project Initiatives and Outcomes

Theft and Vandalism Survey

The project reference group identified that the project worker would require as much information as possible in order to establish current crime levels and trends within the City of Casey.

It was immediately apparent that most construction companies were unable to provide accurate accounts their losses due to theft. The general reluctance of the industry to report these incidents, especially those under a \$500 threshold, to either the police or their insurance company meant that there was limited information available to evaluate.

This lack of statistical data restricted the opportunity to identify existing crime trends by means of the traditional system of Crime Pattern Analysis.

In order to address the first objective of the project—to identify and analyse building site crimes, it became necessary to implement three initiatives:

1. Design a user friendly Theft and Vandalism Survey form for reporting criminal activity;
2. Promote the benefits and use of this survey from to the industry; and
3. Provide a central collation point for the return of the survey form.

Consequently, the survey was introduced and promoted to members of the project reference group, and industry stakeholders including the HIA, MBA and Builder's Alliance Group.

In total, 25 builders involved in the development of the two trial sites were identified. Meetings with 17 of these builders were subsequently held in January

2002 to promote the use of the survey form for a trial 3-month period between February and April 2002. The remaining 8 builders from Lynbrook who were repeatedly 'unavailable' were sent details of the initiative and copies of the new survey form. In addition, the form was circulated to all 50+ members of the industry who were on the mailing list to receive the minutes of the project reference group meetings.

The survey form was not intended to replace the requirement to report incidents in line with existing company policy.

Outcome

The results of this initiative were very disappointing. There were very few surveys forms returned and those that were came from either AV Jennings or Metricon Homes.

On the Lynbrook Estate, no crime surveys were submitted by any of the 24 builders on the Lynbrook Stage 8 during the trial period. One verbal report of apparent scaffolding theft was reported indirectly by one of the builders. The project worker was unable to establish any form of current crime trends or patterns due to the lack of information.


At the Kings Park trial site, three survey forms were received during the trial period. All three incidents were reported to the police and related to the theft of materials.

A total of eight survey forms were received from construction managers relating to incidents in other locations within the City of Casey. Eight survey forms were also received relating to incidents in the Melbourne region.

Research into strategies to address building site crime

The Housing Crime Prevention Officer undertook an analysis of a number of different crime prevention strategies relating to building site theft, including:

- the establishment of working groups including key stakeholders;
- public awareness campaigns including signage and information flyers;
- the CrimeStoppers' and other reward schemes,
- increased surveillance including security patrols; closed circuit television and increased lighting,
- target hardening strategies, such as property marking;
- reducing risk strategies, such as better co-ordination of deliveries to minimise the time the material is left in the open;
- police support and assistance;
- enforcement measures including by-laws; and
- verification of claims by insurers.



Some of these strategies were found to be appropriate and subsequently implemented, whilst others were not adopted due to cost or feasibility limitations.

Large signs at building sites

An integral part of the building site theft strategy was the development of signage installed at key points on each of the two estates.

The signage poster was created by a sub group of the Project Reference Group. The reference group then approved the poster design. The group was also involved in decisions about poster size and location. The inclusion of builders on the reference group provided invaluable knowledge about key issues which can affect the success of a building-related initiative.

The signage was launched on 8 May 2002 at the Council Chambers in Casey by the Mayor of the City of Casey, Councillor Graham Smith. Among the approximately 60 attendees were Commander Leigh Gassner of Victoria Police and Michael Bourne, the then Director of Crime Prevention Victoria (CPV).

All of those in attendance received an information pack containing a CD-ROM including suggested crime prevention strategies and security and suspicious guideline suggestions, a copy of the survey and background information on the project and images of the signage.

Street lighting

Another key initiative of the program was the issue of street lighting, a crime prevention strategy which increases natural surveillance of building sites by surrounding residents.

From the few surveys returned to Casey throughout the duration of the project and as a result of informal discussions with a number of builders, some trends regarding the problems of theft and vandalism were able to be established. Building site theft and vandalism was found to occur predominantly at weekends and outside of working hours. This finding led to the implementation of the lighting initiative.

Given that most thefts from building sites were found to be occurring in the evening and outside working hours, Casey believed that activation of the lighting at an earlier stage in the construction process could lead to the prevention of theft. Prior to the commencement of the Casey program, lighting around building sites was activated when residents moved in to their completed homes. As a result of the findings, the street lighting in the two estates was activated on the day construction commenced on both sites in early March 2002. Importantly, the Council's lighting policy

was subsequently amended to require that street lighting would be activated at the outset of the construction phase for all residential properties.

Letters sent to residents

In order to keep residents informed about the project and to promote their involvement, open letters were distributed to the residents surrounding the trial sites on two occasions. The letter was intended to:

- inform residents of the building site theft project;
- seek their support for the project;
- advise them as to how they could become involved; and
- ease any concerns held by residents that their area may be more prone to theft, by making it clear that the incidence of building site theft was no more prevalent than on other building sites, and that their estates were targeted on the basis that they were being developed "from slab".

Suspicious guidelines information flyer

A "Suspicious Guidelines" flyer was developed by the project officers at Casey, outlining activities that residents and builders should be aware to assist in reducing the incidence of building site theft.

The flyer was distributed to surrounding residents on both estates:

- urging them to be more vigilant about building site theft;
- encouraging greater reporting of such incidents; and
- instructing individuals to contact 000 if they witnessed anything suspicious around building sites.

In addition, the "Suspicious Guidelines" flyer was also distributed to builders in the information pack. This had the benefit of raising their awareness of the information that had been circulated to the community and highlighted what suspicious activities might be reported to the police. The launch of the poster design and new information pack in May 2002 also included a new brochure for the building industry entitled "Building Site Security". The brochure encouraged site managers to secure their materials and equipment more effectively and aimed to increase their awareness of the problem of theft and intruders on site.

Other Major Project Outcomes

Partnerships

A major strength of the Casey Building Site Crime Prevention Project was the partnership approach which was taken to identify problems and explore strategies for action. Community members (residents associations, Neighbourhood Watch and local residents) have provided input at each stage of the project.

Strategies to prevent and reduce crime on residential building sites

As outlined earlier, after consultation with members of the Project Reference Group and key stakeholders, a range of risk management and community education strategies were identified that could be used to help reduce and prevent building site-related crime.

It is important to note that each building site and housing development will present different opportunities for criminal behaviour. By conducting a risk assessment of each site and monitoring criminal activities, a package of strategies can be identified that are relevant and likely to be cost-effective.

A list of possible strategies is outlined below (some of which were implemented during the program):

- control of access to the site;
- improved co-ordination of deliveries;
- formation of a Builder's Liaison Group;
- development of community awareness campaigns;
- cost-benefit analysis of the project;
- council initiatives (eg. Housing Crime Prevention Officer, street lighting, community protection patrols, environmental policies for the site);
- crime prevention signage and builder's rewards;
- insurers' verification of claims;
- media campaign;
- encouragement of the use of the 000 number;
- property marking;
- a prosecution policy for offenders;
- surveillance measures (eg. CCTV, security alarms, security lighting, security patrols); and
- development and dissemination of Suspicious Activity Guidelines and a Theft and Vandalism Survey.

Where to from Here?

The building industry is the stakeholder with the primary responsibility and commitment to reducing building site crime. Other key stakeholders such as insurance companies, the police, Crime Prevention Victoria and the public can work together with the

building industry to implement crime prevention initiatives. Losses from building site crime are likely to continue to increase unless the industry implements a range of co-ordinated crime prevention strategies.

The industry should consider the establishment of a dedicated group responsible for addressing issues of building site crime. Key industry stakeholders should support this group and, where appropriate, contribute to its financing.

Community education is a key strategy in this project. Time and effort in working with the community is likely to be a very cost-effective and well-received activity. Face-to-face contact with, and the support of, community groups such as the Resident's Association and Neighbourhood Watch should be a basis for developing this strategy.

A more thorough analysis of the cost of building site theft is clearly needed. Any investment in a crime prevention strategy to address building site crime should weigh the cost of implementing strategies against the significance of the costs of theft. It appears that the industry has not yet analysed the costs, both direct and indirect, associated with building site theft.

Builders and developers who are aware of the true cost of the crime on their sites are more likely to have taken pro-active approaches to prevent the problem. The investment in a range of crime prevention strategies could significantly minimise the expenses incurred from building site theft.

Conclusions

The Casey Building Site Theft Prevention Project illustrated the lack of knowledge and data on the issue of building site theft and complacency amongst the industry to address the problem.

While there were many positive aspects to the project, there is a definite need for a multi-agency approach to underpin any crime prevention strategies to address the issue of building site theft.

Crime Prevention Victoria is committed to identifying and promoting

"Effective Practice in Crime Prevention"

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