

Criminal Damage – Problem Analysis

ABOUT THESE GUIDES

This is one in a series of guides designed to share ideas for tackling vandalism and other forms of criminal damage. This guide covers problem analysis – how to use data to understand what is happening, to give the best chance of successful reduction.

Other guides already produced in this series cover:

- tackling vandalism and other criminal damage;
- tools and powers for tackling criminal damage;
- environmental approaches ;
- tackling youth vandalism;
- high visibility “policing”;
- tackling arson; and
- environmental clean-up days

If there are any other subjects you would like covered, or if you have any comments on these guides please send them to us via your regional Government Office or the Welsh Assembly Government.

WHAT IS CRIMINAL DAMAGE?

Criminal damage, a term used interchangeably with vandalism, refers to crimes where any person without lawful excuse intentionally or recklessly destroys or damages any property belonging to another. Activities resulting in non-permanent damage (i.e. that can be rectified, cleaned off or removed at no cost) such as letting down car tyres, should not be classed as criminal damage; nor should accidental damage.

WHY DO PROBLEM ANALYSIS?

Criminal Damage, or vandalism, is a term that covers a wide range of offences. Some people have talked about ‘not knowing where to start’ in tackling it. Efforts to reduce criminal damage are more likely to succeed if they are based on breaking the problem down into smaller, well-understood chunks, or problems; and each of these problems addressed in turn.

It also makes sense that the smaller a problem you try to tackle, the more likely you are to find a suitable solution. An attempt that tries to tackle all criminal damage, is unlikely to find a solution that works across the whole range of types of damage. So problem analysis enables solutions that can be tailored to fit.

WHAT IS PROBLEM ANALYSIS?

Essentially, Problem Analysis is about understanding what ‘problem’ you are trying to solve.

When criminal damage to vehicles rose in an urban CDRP, problem analysis enabled analysts to find out what was causing the rise in the numbers – spates of tyre slashing – which was the first step towards deciding how to tackle it. This illustrates that some of the key steps in problem analysis are digging into more detail of the data; then using the information to define what the problem is.

Other examples of how to ‘break down’ a problem are:

- focussing on a particular area, perhaps just a few streets, which seem to be suffering disproportionately;
- analysing which times of day, or day of week, crimes are committed;
- looking for similar crimes – with the same *modus operandi* (MO), or shared characteristics of victims.

HOW TO DO PROBLEM ANALYSIS

There are a range of useful guides and publications on problem analysis, often part of larger works on problem solving. Particularly helpful is ‘Become a problem solving crime analyst in 55 small steps’, available on the crime reduction website. A very brief summary of some of the main points as they relate to problem analysis for criminal damage is as follows:

- **Problem Definition** - try to define your problem as tightly as possible, including from the perspectives of Community, Harm, Expectation, Events, Recurring, and Similarity;
- **Hotspots** - Know where they are, and what type they are – crime generators, crime attractors, or crime-enablers;
- **Trend** - Take account of long-term change – this will, as in the tyre-slashing example, enable the separation of one-off events and spates from seasonal, daily or weekly cycles, from underlying increases or decreases

REPEAT VICTIMISATION

National figures suggest that levels of repeat victimisation for criminal damage are higher than many other crimes, with 30% of victims suffering twice or more in 12 monthsⁱⁱ. If this is consistent across the country, then it is likely that this aspect of problem analysis could pave the way for significant reductions. So a crucial part of understanding your crime problem, is to know who or what is being repeatedly targeted in your area. It may then be possible to focus reduction efforts where the risk of crime is greatest.

'Become a Problem Solving Crime Analyst' covers repeat victimisation, as does a separate toolkit on the crime reduction web site.

INCREASED REPORTING

One factor which can limit problem analysis is levels of reporting. At a national level, the British Crime Survey suggests that only about one offence in three of domestic damage is reported to the police. Any change in people's tendency to report offences of damage can mean a rise in recorded crime figures, not linked to a real rise in crime.

As a minimum, this should be borne in mind when undertaking problem analysis – in particular as initiatives to tackle damage can lead to raising of expectations and standards, so what might not have been reported before, now is.

It should be possible, through looking at data over time, to see a 'step change' in reporting, which can then be allowed for in future analysis and interpretation.

Ideally, one would have a second or even third source of information, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the situation. One possible source would be to carry out a visual audit of an area, to provide objective evidence of whether it is getting better or worse.ⁱⁱⁱ

CHECKLISTS

Two problem solving checklists have been designed for those planning to conduct a problem analysis in their area. They are aimed primarily at analysts – practitioners may wish to discuss the issues with their analyst. The elements from both Read & Tilley's (2000)^{iv} Tilley & Laycock's (2002)^v checklists have been amalgamated in the two checklists presented below. The first set of considerations are useful in checking how you are planning to collect and analyse data on problems.

Checklist 1: Initial considerations

Problem identification/scanning		Y/N
1	Are repeat calls for service and repeat crimes routinely scanned?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Are efforts to identify and analyse past and emerging problems routine?	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Has local research been undertaken to find out whether specific crime generating attributes exist in your particular area?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Have local data been analysed to find out whether there are special conditions particular to your problem?	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Are simple emerging problems allocated to individuals for their response, either on their own or in conjunction with other agencies?	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Are more complex emerging problems identified/prioritised in routine discussion amongst partners?	<input type="checkbox"/>
7	Do partnerships routinely try to anticipate and forestall future problems?	<input type="checkbox"/>

The second set of considerations cover what one will need in place to conduct robust analysis of background factors and problems in the local area. These are outlined below.

Checklist 2: Specific considerations for analysing data

Causal analysis/Analysis		
1	Are adequate data collection and sharing arrangements in place to be used in problem identification and analysis?	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	Are local analysts available who are familiar with relevant theory, crime reduction literature, and analytic techniques to identify and analyse problems?	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Do analysts have the hardware and software they need to do their job?	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Do analysts have a competent source of advice and supervision for their analytic work?	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Do analysts work in partnership with same agency colleagues responsible for dealing with problems, and with those in other agencies and their analysts?	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	Do staff in supervisory positions have training and experience in analysis?	<input type="checkbox"/>

NEED MORE HELP?

Further information and assistance on tackling criminal damage is also available via your regional Government Office / Welsh Assembly Government or from:

- i) Crime Reduction website (www.crimereduction.gov.uk)
- ii) Together Academies which bring together practitioners to provide advice and training on specific issues to transform the way that they tackle anti-social behaviour.
- iii) ASB Action Days when an expert practitioner will meet with ASB teams and their partners to help find solutions to intractable problems, refocus action to get results, encourage use of the full range of new anti-social behaviour powers or remove blockages that are preventing progress.
- iv) ASB Action Line (0870 220 2000) and website (www.together.gov.uk) which provide information, solutions and best practice to help practitioners tackle anti-social behaviour.
- v) Overseas websites such as the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (<http://www.crime-prevention-intl.org/index.php>); the Center for Problem-Oriented Policing (www.popcenter.org); and the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (www.ncjrs.gov).
- vi) Specific papers and websites on problem solving such as the [Crime Reduction Learning Zone](#)

ⁱ Burrell and Erol (2006): A real rise in crime or a passing spate? The example of tyre slashing in the West Midlands. London: UCL Jill Dando Institute

ⁱⁱ Nicholas et al (2005): Crime In England and Wales London: Home Office

ⁱⁱⁱ An example of a visual audit is available at <http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/sccwebsite/sccwspublications.nsf/SCSUWebLookupFileResourcesByUNID/docidFF8DC2192F7BAA0180256E53004FAE36?OpenDocument>

^{iv} Read, T. & Tilley, N (2000) Not Rocket Science? Problem-solving and crime reduction, Home Office Crime Reduction Research Series Paper 6, London: Home Office

^v Tilley, N. & Laycock, G. (2002) Working out what to do: Evidence-based crime reduction, Crime Reduction Research Series Paper 11: London: Home Office