

Crime Prevention Matters



NATIONAL
CRIME
PREVENTION
COUNCIL



The National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) is a private, nonprofit tax-exempt 501(c)(3) organization whose primary mission is to be the nation's leader in helping people keep themselves, their families, and their communities safe from crime. NCPC's strategic plan for 2007 through 2011 is centered on four goals: protect children and youth; partner with government and law enforcement to prevent crime; promote crime prevention and personal safety basics; and respond to emerging crime trends. NCPC publishes books, kits of camera-ready program materials, posters, and informational and policy reports on a variety of crime prevention and community-building subjects. NCPC offers training, technical assistance, and a national focus for crime prevention: it acts as secretariat for the Crime Prevention Coalition of America, more than 400 national, federal, state, and local organizations representing thousands of constituents who are committed to preventing crime. NCPC also sponsors the National Crime Prevention Association, an individual membership association to promote resources and career development to crime prevention practitioners. It hosts two websites: www.ncpc.org for adults and www.mcgruff.org for children. It operates demonstration programs in schools, neighborhoods, and entire jurisdictions and takes a major leadership role in youth crime prevention and youth service. NCPC manages the McGruff® "Take A Bite Out Of Crime®" public service advertising campaign. NCPC is funded through a variety of government agencies, corporate and private foundations, and donations from private individuals.



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The American public thinks crime is a serious problem, and in fact, that crime is worse today than it was one year ago. This finding was consistent across national surveys conducted in the fall of 2007 by three very different organizations: Gallup¹; the Center for Media, Crime & Justice at John Jay College²; and Third Way,³ a Washington, DC, think tank. Yet this perception runs counter to the facts: Crime rates have dropped off dramatically since the early 1990s. This is true of both violent crimes and property crimes. The downward trend applies not only to crimes that are known to law enforcement agencies,⁴ but also to victimizations reported in household surveys⁵ (which include incidents that were never reported to authorities).

Why does it matter that people think crime is on the rise? It matters

because fear of crime factors into people's decisions about where they go and what they do. People avoid neighborhoods that are thought to be dangerous—even if they aren't. They watch television rather than walk outside—even though most people believe their own neighborhoods are safe. They limit their children's social activities—even though the gravest danger to children comes from people they know. As James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling so eloquently stated, "Our crime statistics and victimization surveys measure individual losses, but they do not measure communal losses."⁶

Avoidance behaviors like these have important consequences. Perhaps most obviously, they diminish the quality of life for the people who engage in them. But fear of crime has significant ramifications that

¹ "Gallup's Pulse of Democracy: Crime." www.gallup.com/poll/1603/Crime.aspx, accessed 4/11/2008.

² Center on Media, Crime & Justice, "John Jay Poll on Public Attitudes Towards Crime and Crime Reporting, 2007." www.jjay.cuny.edu/cmj/pdfs/JohnJay_Poll.pdf, accessed 3/5/2008.

³ "Third Way Crime Poll Highlights."

www.thirdway.org/data/product/file/120/TW_Crime_Poll_Toplines_wHighlights.pdf, accessed 2/26/08.

⁴ U.S. Department of Justice. Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Crime in the United States, 2006*. Table 1. www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/data/table_01.html, accessed 4/27/2008.

⁵ U.S. Department of Justice. Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Criminal Victimization, 2006*. Washington, DC: December 2007.

⁶ James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling, "Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety," *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1982, 29-38.

spill over into other aspects of daily life. When a neighborhood is perceived to be dangerous, businesses will suffer. Property values will plummet. The local economy will decline.

Research is mixed on the relationship between the economy and crime, but some studies suggest reasons for concern that crime rates will climb again

- Mortgage foreclosures have reached crisis levels in many communities—and neighborhoods with higher rates of foreclosures tend to experience more violent crime.⁷
- Consumer confidence is trending downward—and as consumers lose confidence, crime, and especially robbery and property crime, tends to rise.⁸

A recent survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors confirms that these factors are, indeed, driving increases in crime in many cities⁹

- 42 percent of the 124 responding cities reported that they are seeing increased crime as a result of current economic conditions.

- 29 percent reported an increase in crime resulting from the mortgage foreclosure crisis and the increase in the number of vacant and abandoned properties.

Noted criminologist Alfred Blumstein sees additional reasons for concern¹⁰

- It is increasingly difficult for young people lacking high school or college diplomas to find satisfactory employment.
- Social services have been substantially reduced with shrinking budgets at all levels of government.
- Law enforcement responsibilities have expanded to include terrorism as well as crime.
- Emerging drug markets may provoke violence, “especially if the principal participants in those markets are from communities with a strong tradition for violence.”
- An estimated 650,000 prisoners will be returning to communities each year.
- Guns are more prevalent in certain disadvantaged communities than they were before the crack cocaine era of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In fact, the nationwide decline in violent crime came to a halt in 2005. Since then, the violent crime rate has varied somewhat from year to year, most recently posting a decrease of 0.7 percent in 2007.¹¹ However, national statistics mask the reality in some cities, which have experienced alarming spikes in violent crime: 45 of 56 cities responding to a survey by the Police Executive Research Forum reported increases in robberies between 2004 and 2006. The robbery rate jumped more than 12 percent, and aggravated assaults with a firearm increased nearly 10 percent.¹² Similarly, half of the 124 cities responding to the U.S. Conference of Mayors survey reported increases in violence among young people over the last year.¹³

This is not the time to become complacent about crime in America.

Crime Takes a Huge Financial Toll

The financial costs of crime are borne not only by victims, but by their families, employers, insurers, communities, and society as a whole.

⁷ Dan Immergluck and Geoff Smith, “The Impact of Single-Family Mortgage Foreclosures on Neighborhood Crime,” Research Report. Chicago: Woodstock Institute, 2005.

⁸ Richard Rosenfeld and Robert Fornango, “The Impact of Economic Conditions on Robbery and Property Crime: The Role of Consumer Sentiment,” *Criminology* 45, no. 4 (2007): 735-770.

⁹ The U.S. Conference of Mayors. *2008 Economic Downturn and Federal Inaction Impact on Crime*. www.usmayors.org/maf/CrimeReport_0808.pdf, accessed 8/7/2008.

¹⁰ Alfred Blumstein, “The Crime Drop in America: An Exploration of Some Recent Crime Trends,” *Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention* 7 (2006): 17-35.

¹¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2007*. www.fbi.gov/uct/cius2007/offenses/violent_crime/index.html, accessed 9/16/2008.

¹² Police Executive Research Forum. *Violent Crime in America: 24 Months of Alarming Trends*. Washington, DC: Author, 2007.

¹³ U.S. Conference of Mayors, *2008 Economic Downturn and Federal Inaction Impact on Crime*.

Notwithstanding fluctuations in crime rates overall, the financial burden continues to mount

- In 2005, crime victims incurred more than \$17 billion,¹⁴ up from \$16 billion the year before.
- Also in 2005, federal, state, and local governments spent about \$204 billion for police protection, corrections, and judicial and legal activities associated with crime,¹⁵ compared to \$185 billion in 2003.¹⁶
- For corrections alone, state general fund expenditures topped \$44 billion in 2007, up 315% since 1987.¹⁷

And these estimates do not include costs incurred by financial crimes, including consumer fraud and identity theft. In 2007, Consumer Sentinel, a complaint database developed and maintained by the Federal Trade Commission, received over 250,000 identity theft complaints, accounting for 32 percent of the total of 813,899 consumer fraud complaints received.¹⁸ Consumers lost an estimated \$1.2 billion to fraud that year—and this number is escalating.

These figures are particularly alarming because identity theft and fraud cross jurisdictional boundaries and apprehension and prosecution rates are very low. Prevention is the best tool available to guard against the devastating impact of financial crimes.

Numerous studies, summarized in a 2005 report of the National Crime Prevention Council, point to the cost-effectiveness of crime prevention initiatives.¹⁹ Investments in crime prevention should be welcome in an era of tight budgets at all levels of government. To maximize the impact of these investments, there are steps that *everyone*—not only government and law enforcement agencies—can take to reduce crime.

The Urgent Need for National Crime Prevention Policy

With violent crime poised to rise once again, the costs of crime escalating, and Americans' expressed belief that crime in this country is getting worse, it is time for this country's leaders to chart a new course for crime prevention. In fact, this may be the ideal time, as there

is no immediate crime “crisis” impelling actions that are emotionally driven and ill-advised. Instead, policy makers can avail themselves of an opportunity to consider lessons learned from research and experience and proceed toward a reasoned approach to effective, long-term crime prevention policy.

In addition, there are several significant roles in implementing crime prevention strategies that only the federal government can play²⁰

- *Leadership*, through funding, technical assistance, and support for innovations and initiatives that exceed the resources of individual state and local governments
- *Evaluation and development*, to identify and promote best practices
- *Infrastructure enhancement*, by underwriting specialized task forces and technological advances to encourage multijurisdictional collaboration and leverage resources

By stepping forward to assert a strong national policy, America's leaders will set the stage for a ripple effect of changes in policy at all

¹⁴ U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Expenditure and Employment Statistics*. www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/eande.htm, accessed 4/7/2008.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 2005: Statistical Tables*. Table 82. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2007.

¹⁶ Kristin A. Hughes, *Justice Expenditure and Employment in the United States, 2003*. Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics. www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/pub/pdf/jeeus03.pdf, accessed 4/7/2008.

¹⁷ National Association of State Budget Officers, “State Expenditure Report” series, in *One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008*, p. 12 (Philadelphia, PA: Pew Center on the States).

¹⁸ Federal Trade Commission. *Consumer Fraud and Identity Theft Complaint Data: January – December 2007*. Washington, DC, 2008.

¹⁹ National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), *Preventing Crime Saves Money* (Washington, DC: NCPC, 2005).

²⁰ National Criminal Justice Association, “The Role of the Federal Government in Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice,” March 2005. <http://www.ncja.org>, accessed 6/9/2008.

levels of government, leading in turn to widespread adoption of proven crime prevention strategies nationwide. Americans will be safer, and their fear of crime will dissipate.

Draw Attention to Prevention

Meanwhile, even in the absence of national policy, enterprising individuals and organizations in communities across the country are working to educate the public about crime and their risk for victimization, and in the process, teach them about strategies for preventing crime. Most of these strategies depend heavily on people and businesses to keep watch over their neighborhoods and communities, working in tandem with their local law enforcement agencies. Citizens need to work closely with local law enforcement serving as the eyes and ears of the community.

In his paper, *Fear of Crime in the United States*, sociologist Mark Warr argues that when the public's perceptions of crime are widely divergent from the reality, the consequences can be severe. As noted above, people who have an exaggerated fear of crime may modify their behaviors in ways that limit their opportunities for work or leisure activities. Conversely, people who underestimate the risk of crime may fail to take common sense, protec-

tive measures, in the process potentially exposing themselves to victimization.

Dr. Warr suggests three ways to better align perceptions with actual risk:²¹

- 1) Educate people about the context of crimes that are reported in the media
- 2) Educate them about the facts surrounding likelihood of victimization
- 3) Address the environmental cues to danger

All these efforts are mainstays of crime prevention, which the Crime Prevention Coalition of America defines as “*a pattern of attitudes and behaviors directed both at reducing the threat of crime and enhancing the sense of safety and security, to positively influence the quality of life in our society, and to help develop environments where crime cannot flourish.*”

Through the National Citizens' Crime Prevention Campaign, the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) trains crime prevention professionals and concerned citizens in effective strategies to help reduce crime in their communities. Informative publications, school curricula, community outreach, and a dynamic website all help Americans understand that *preventing crime is everyone's business.*

See the Bigger Picture

Any type of crime that occurs in a community can be viewed as an opportunity to educate local residents about the objective reality of crime, and to offer specific suggestions for prevention. NCPC has long been recognized as the nation's leading resource for crime prevention information and education.

For example, when the media report that foreclosed homes in a particular neighborhood have attracted vandals and burglars, it may be useful to explain why (certain property left behind may be considered lucrative)—and then go on to offer tips for prevention.

The oft-cited “broken windows” theory of crime prevention argues that even relatively innocuous conditions in a neighborhood can signal a lack of attention. But when broken windows are repaired, lawns are mowed, and yards are trash-free, these buildings will give the impression they are still occupied—or at least cared for and closely watched. They will no longer be magnets for crime. Mortgage holders, real estate agents, and neighbors should welcome this kind of information.

Recently, the nation was horrified to learn about a young victim of cyberbullying who committed suicide. Research suggests that cyber-

²¹ Mark Warr, “Fear of Crime in the United States: Avenues for Research and Policy,” in *Measurement and Analysis of Crime and Justice*, ed. David Duffee, 451-489 (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2000).

bullying is more common than we care to believe—more than four in 10 teens who responded to a survey commissioned by NCPC report being victimized in this way.²² We should acknowledge this statistic and take the next step to educate teens and parents about preventing these insidious attacks. NCPC’s campaign, *Cyberbullying: Don’t Write It. Don’t Forward It.* features prize-winning public service announcements and informational materials.

NCPC raises awareness and offers prevention tips and resources on a wide variety of issues affecting everyone from children to seniors. Visit www.ncpc.org to learn more.

Understand the Risk

According to the John Jay survey, two-thirds of Americans get most of their information about crime from television news broadcasts. Of necessity, the “6:00 Evening News” highlights crimes that are deemed “newsworthy,” either because the incidents are unusual or because the victims or offenders are public figures. The time allotted for these news items allows little more than a “sound bite”—who, what, when, and where. As a result, the viewing audience gets a skewed version of criminal incidents, and their fears

may be raised unnecessarily or unreasonably.²³

For example, when a child is reported to have been abducted by a stranger—every parent’s worst nightmare—the public should be aware that approximately 100 such cases occur each year.²⁴ This statistic is not meant to diminish the horror, but rather to assure parents how unlikely it is that any individual child will be victimized in this way. The next step is to educate parents about protecting their children from the more likely source of danger—people they know.

Teach Teens To Prevent Cyberbullying

Teach teens to

- Refuse to pass along cyberbullying messages
- Tell friends to stop cyberbullying
- Block communication with cyberbullies
- Report cyberbullying to a trusted adult

Young people can also prevent cyberbullying by

- Speaking with other students, as well as teachers and school administrators, to develop rules against cyberbullying
- Raising awareness of the cyberbullying problem in your community by holding an assembly and creating fliers to give to younger kids or parents
- Sharing NCPC’s anti-cyberbullying message with friends

Let teens know that even though you can’t see a cyberbully or the bully’s victim, cyberbullying causes real problems. If you wouldn’t say it in person, don’t say it online. Delete cyberbullying. Don’t write it. Don’t forward it.

“Given the ubiquity of messages about crime in our society and costs of inaccurate information, it is incumbent on criminal justice officials to provide the public with reliable information about crime . . .”

—Mark Warr

²² National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC), *Teens and Cyberbullying* (Washington, DC: NCPC, 2007).

²³ Sara Tiegreen and Elana Newman, “How are crime and violence covered in the news? Comparing reporting with reality.” www.dartcenter.org/research/fact_sheets/fact_sheet5.php, accessed 4/28/2008.

²⁴ Andrea J. Sedlak, David Finkelhor, Heather Hammer, and Dana J. Schultz. U.S. Department of Justice. “National Estimates of Missing Children: An Overview,” in *National Incidence Studies of Missing, Abducted, Runaway, and Thrownaway Children*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, October 2002, 5.

To help law enforcement communicate reliable information to the public in the aftermath of a high-profile local incident, the National Crime Prevention Council and the Advertising Council, Inc. developed ten radio rapid response public service announcements (PSAs). Each PSA covers a specific issue: burglary, fraud, home invasion, kids and theft, prevention at work, school violence (for both kids and parents), senior fraud, sexual assault, and threats to children. Each PSA can be localized and all are available through NCPC. If used effectively, these materials can help the media deliver a more *prevention-focused* message to allay unnecessary fear in their communities.

Address Environmental Cues

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) is a long-standing practice that relies on creative and effective use of the built

environment to reduce the fear and incidence of crime and to instill improvements in the quality of life.²⁵ Since its inception more than 25 years ago, NCPC has trained law enforcement officers and other community leaders across the country in CPTED principles and strategies. Strategically placed lighting, creative landscaping, alternative traffic patterns—all are examples of incorporating crime prevention into the built environment.

Here's a success story that attests to the value of CPTED in preventing violent crime:

Several women had been sexually assaulted in the ground-level laundry room of an apartment building. Crime prevention specialists from NCPC and local law enforcement inspected the area and offered several recommendations

- Rearrange the laundry facilities to allow unobstructed views of all areas of the room from the windows
- Install better lighting in those areas
- Trim shrubbery around the windows to increase visibility

After these measures were implemented, there were no more assaults.

Crime Prevention Helps Everyone

Strong leadership can move crime prevention to the forefront for policymakers at all levels of government and for individual Americans across the country. By supporting prevention—through funding, legislation, and dissemination of best practices—America's leaders can pave the way for safer and economically vibrant neighborhoods.

In short—*Crime Prevention Matters!*

He who does not prevent crime when he can, encourages it.

—Roman philosopher, Seneca

²⁵ For more information about Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED), visit www.ncpc.org.



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