

Tackling vandalism and other criminal damage

ABOUT THESE GUIDES

This is one in a series of guides designed to share ideas for tackling vandalism and other forms of criminal damage. They are based, as far as possible, on examples we have found from around the UK and further afield. Although in most cases these have not been rigorously evaluated, they are reported to have been successful in tackling this sort of crime.

This guide gives a broad overview of the problem and how it can be tackled. Other guides already produced in this series cover:

- the available powers and how they can be used;
- environmental approaches;
- tackling youth offenders; and
- high visibility “policing”

Further guides are in preparation including on arson, criminal damage to vehicles and analysing criminal damage data.

These guides are intended to be living documents that can be up-dated as necessary so if you have any comments on these guides or if there are any other subjects you would like covered, please send your suggestions to us via your regional Government Office or the Welsh Assembly Government.

WHAT IS VANDALISM / CRIMINAL DAMAGE?

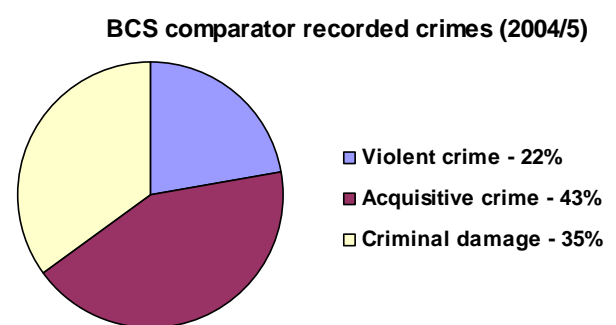
Criminal damage refers to crimes where any person without lawful excuse intentionally or recklessly destroys or damages any property belonging to anotherⁱ. Activities resulting in non-permanent damage (i.e. that can be rectified, cleaned off or removed at no cost) such as letting down of car tyres should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

Any damage around a point of entry to a house or vehicle should be treated as attempted burglary / vehicle crime rather than criminal damage if, on the balance of probabilities, one of those crimes is the more likely offence than criminal damageⁱⁱ.

Vandalism is the term used in the British Crime Survey. Whilst the definition has been kept as close as possible to that of criminal damage, it only covers crimes against households and household property, including cars.

WHY TACKLE CRIMINAL DAMAGE?

Criminal damageⁱⁱⁱ makes up over a third of the crime that forms the comparator set of recorded crimes that most closely match the crimes covered by the British Crime Survey:



Robbery included under acquisitive rather than violent crime

Driving it down is, therefore, crucial to delivering the crime reduction targets that Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) have agreed with the Government Offices / Welsh Assembly Government. In 2006/7, criminal damage will also become a Key Diagnostic Indicator under the Policing Performance Assessment Framework.

Data from the British Crime Survey and Home Office assessments of the costs of crime also suggest that it costs around £2.1bn a year.

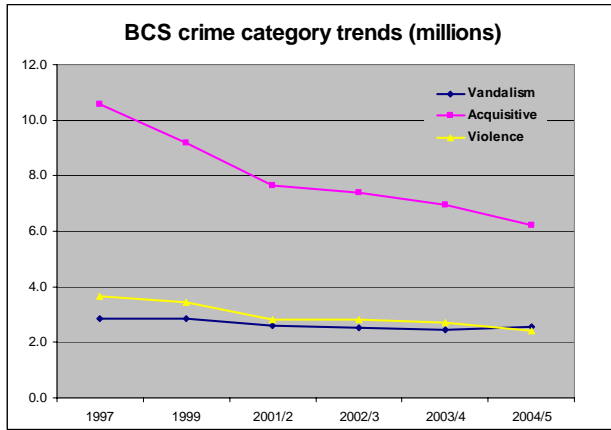
More importantly, whilst criminal damage may often appear to be a minor crime, it is a crime that the public are concerned about – consistently appearing in the 3 strands of anti-social behaviour causing most concern^{iv}. The way we perceive our surroundings has a massive impact on both communities and individual behaviour. A neglected physical environment is unsafe. It undermines pride in the local community that can lead to further degradation. It can also act as a catalyst to other forms of anti-social behaviour and crime^v.

There are also numerous examples of those involved in more serious crimes also being involved in, or starting out committing, crimes like criminal damage – tackling this

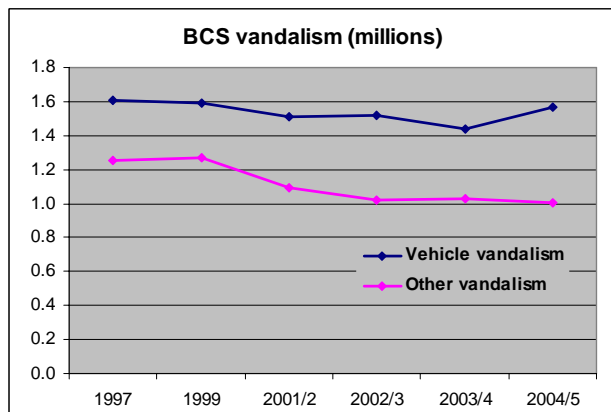
type of crime may therefore provide a way of stopping more serious offending developing both in the short and longer term.

Reflecting these factors, over three-quarters of CDRPs have set targets for reducing criminal damage.

Unfortunately, whilst other types of crime have - according to the British Crime Survey - been falling, levels of overall vandalism are more-or-less unchanged since 1997:



Separating this into the two BCS sub-categories, shows that whilst "other vandalism" fell slightly between 1999 and 2002/3, it has stayed more-or-less level since then. And "vehicle vandalism" rose last year and is not significantly different from the level in 1997.



Recorded criminal damage in 2004/5 was also 6.5% higher than in 2002/3.

WHAT IS KNOWN ABOUT CRIMINAL DAMAGE - VICTIMS, OFFENDERS, LOCATIONS AND TIMES

At a national level – from British Crime Surveys, Crime and Justice Surveys and recorded crime data – a great deal is known about the nature of the problem. For example:

- Around two-fifths of BCS vandalism is against vehicles, with damage to bodywork, wing mirrors and tyres most common

- Around a quarter of BCS vandalism is to homes with damage to walls, fences and other garden items most common
- Victims of previous criminal damage incidents and those living in high crime areas are at a much higher risk
- Cars are most often damaged when parked in the street near the owner’s home
- Offenders are predominantly aged 21 or under and gave reasons for committing the crime that include alcohol; for the “buzz” or being bored; and revenge / annoyance with the victim;
- Over four-fifths of offences are committed on the spur of the moment
- Recorded crime figures suggest that racial motives appear to be behind only a small minority of offences, but these figures may not show the true scale of the problem. Nor do they show how many criminal damage incidents are the result of other ‘hate’ motives like homophobia.

This is the national picture – do you know where criminal damage is occurring in your area? Who / what sort of people are the victims and main offenders? What is driving the problem? What is the nature of the damage and how are they committing it? When is it happening: are there patterns in terms of the time of day, day of the week, seasons or around specific days like Hallowe’en? Is there, for example, a problem around pubs and clubs at closing time, or around schools at dinner time or the end of the day? And for all of these questions, do you know why? Answering such questions, as fully as you can, will significantly improve your chances of dealing with the problem efficiently and effectively.

This **problem-oriented** approach has been used successfully in Operation Mullion in **Portsmouth** where the **SARA**^{vi} model was extensively employed to deal with antisocial behaviour and criminal activity around a school. Interventions that then either increased the perceived **risk** or **effort**; reduced the anticipated **reward**; or removed the **excuses** or **provocations**^{vii} were then implemented.

“Developing Crime Reduction Plans: Some Examples from the Reducing Burglary Initiative”^{viii} looks at how crime reduction activity can be planned in a problem-oriented partnership way.

WHAT WORKS IN REDUCING VANDALISM / CRIMINAL DAMAGE

In terms of specifically reducing criminal damage, there is good evidence that youth diversion projects; target hardening (for example, through improving natural or



other surveillance); and work within schools on raising awareness of the impact of vandalism are effective.

Practitioners tackling ASB and criminal damage have found warnings and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) useful as they are a non-punitive means of address behaviour. Separate publicity campaigns (as opposed to publicity supporting other activities – see below), nurturing a sense of ownership and responsibility, rapid repair, designing out crime and better management of void properties can also be useful tools.

The use of Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) is synonymous with taking action and tackling ASB. They are a very popular tool and can have the desired effect. Advice and guidance on the use of ASBOs can be found at the TOGETHER website (www.together.gov.uk).

Experience from the Reducing Burglary Initiative within the Crime Reduction Programme suggests that it may be better to focus effort and resources on a small number of interventions; to concentrate activity in a small area; and to maximise speed of implementation rather than try to do too many different things spread over too large an area over too long a period^x.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Experience shows that significant reductions in criminal damage can be achieved by a thorough focus on performance management for all crime types. Successfully reducing crime, including criminal damage, requires clear strategic and local ownership supported by effective tasking and co-ordinating in accordance with the National Intelligence Model (NIM).

In **North Tyneside**, criminal damage is fully incorporated into their performance management system including the **Tasking and Co-ordinating Group**, with targets set for reducing the number of crimes and actions in place to monitor and drive up the quality of investigation, record keeping and case file preparation.

VALUE AND USE OF PUBLICITY

Publicity can play an important part in maximising the impact of other interventions. Some even argue that publicity can have an effect before any interventions are ever implemented, but at the least they can help to increase impact by deterring offenders, and by reassuring and gaining the support of local law-abiding people. To maximise this, you should consider carefully how publicity can be used pro-actively. By not being too specific about exactly what is happening, when and where, the potential deterrence effect could possibly be increased even further. Care must be taken, though, not to glamorise the criminal behaviour or possible consequences, or to give offenders information which assists them to circumvent any tactics being employed.

Where applicable publicity should be timed around specific dates to make it easier for local people to make a connection, such as school holidays if youth vandalism has been identified, or public holidays if alcohol related vandalism is the issue. It is recommended that leaflets or other printed materials such as posters or newsletters are distributed one to two weeks in advance of any work and reports are shared with the public one or two weeks afterwards.

PARTNERSHIP APPROACH

Tackling crime in general benefits from a partnership^x approach but this is especially the case for criminal damage. Many agencies are affected by the problem. They may, for example, have data or expertise to help analyse the problem, they should benefit from any reductions and may be able to play a part in tackling it.

So, as well as basing whatever action you decide to take on the best possible understanding of the nature of the local problem, it is essential that you fully consider the knowledge, capacity, and commitment^{xi} of you and your key partners to deliver it. Be aware that interventions that are effective in one area will not necessarily work in another so don't just copy schemes that have been successful elsewhere.

The most crucial partners are probably local people and businesses – there are numerous examples of projects that have gained the support of local people doing well, and of those that have not failing. Home Office Development and Practice Report 43 – Practical lessons for involving the community in crime and disorder problem-solving – provides “Do’s and don’ts” plus other useful advice on engaging local people as part of a problem-oriented approach.

In **Bexley**, an area around a school was designated a **Community Safety Action Zone** resulting in a range of initiatives to increase police-public co-operation including a dedicated police team; regular “**Have a say**” days and problem solving meetings; people’s panels; and street corner meetings.

CRACKDOWN AND CONSOLIDATION

One approach that may be particularly worth trying with criminal damage is crackdown and consolidation. Intensive activity in an area can reduce the problem. However, it is usually not possible to sustain this and once that activity stops there is a danger that the problem will re-emerge over time. Local people can then become cynical about the real benefit of short term interventions. By following the crackdown with something less resource intensive in the area the gains can be consolidated.

In **Hull**, a **mobile police station** was positioned in various parts of the city. Officers patrolled from it and it also provided a place for local residents to drop in to report problems etc. improving police–community relations. Before moving on to the next location, efforts were made to leave something behind for the community, such as a new **community centre**.

REPEAT VICTIMISATION

Figures from the British Crime Survey show that victims of vandalism are at a high risk of being victimised again – for 2004/5, 16% of victims had experienced 2 incidents and a further 13% more than 2 incidents. Reducing repeat victimisation could therefore significantly reduce overall levels.

In **Lancashire**, a mixture of responses was used following persistent victimisation of a shop including: **high visibility patrolling**, **professional independent witnesses** and encouraging reporting. The parents of the identified offenders were then threatened with eviction under the **Harassment Act**.

REPORTING & RECORDING

The Home Office is very conscious that local activities to tackle criminal damage, as well as the drive towards neighbourhood policing and initiatives like the Single Non-Emergency Number could lead to increased reporting of this particular crime type. How this will affect policing and CDRP performance assessment regimes is being considered.

False reporting - so that the supposed victims can claim on insurance, get the landlord to repair damage, raise their case for being moved etc. - can also be an issue. Some forces have started asking alleged victims of certain crimes to sign declarations reminding them that making false reports wastes

police time, is an offence and could lead to prosecution. One has a similar message on its telephone call handling system.

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).

ⁱ Criminal Damage Act 1971 Section 1

ⁱⁱ Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime

ⁱⁱⁱ Home Office counting codes 56 & 58

^{iv} British Crime Survey

^v The broken window theory, though not all criminologists agree with this

^{vi} Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment

^{vii} Ron Clarke (1997)

^{viii} Curtin, L., Tilley, N., Owen, M., and Pease, K. (2001) Developing Crime Reduction Plans: Some Examples from the Reducing Burglary Initiative

^{ix} Kodz, J. and Pease, K. (2003) Reducing Burglary Initiative: early findings on burglary reduction

^x Hedderman, C. and Williams, C. (2001) Making partnerships work: emerging findings from the reducing burglary initiative

^{xi} Jacobson, J. (2003) The Reducing Burglary Initiative: Planning for Partnership: Home Office Development and Practice Report no. 4. London: Home Office.