

The Virginia NEWS LETTER

Crime Prevention in Virginia

by John G. Schuiteman

“Crime Prevention is a pattern of attitudes and behaviors directed at reducing the threat of crime, enhancing the sense of safety and security, improving the quality of life and developing environments in which crime cannot flourish.”
National Crime Prevention Council (1990)

“Crime prevention” as part of United States social policy began in earnest in the 1960s, when public safety officials realized that enforcing the law would not by itself stop the occurrence of lawlessness. The effects of poverty and unemployment, increased availability of illegal drugs, militant demands for civil rights, violent anti-war protests and minority distrust of police were all seen by many government officials as creating an environment that threatened the rule of law. In response, Congress passed legislation, the Omnibus Safe Streets and Crime Control Act of 1968, thereby acknowledging a forgotten truth: that the rule of law can survive only with assistance and support from the citizenry.

It was soon thereafter that the first community crime prevention programs, the local “neighborhood watch” associations, were established. Along with factors such as the ending of parole, greater use of incarceration in sentencing, a decrease in



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the size of the crime-prone population cohort, and the adoption of community-oriented policing, this new increase in crime prevention programming and the growth of a cadre of prevention specialists have coincided with a significant reduction in crime. As shown in **Figure 1**, crime rates have diminished in the last decade and a half. The strongest decline occurred in property crimes (burglary, larceny, theft and auto theft) as opposed to violent crimes (murder, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault). Although the extent that crime prevention efforts contributed to this decline is unknown, a good case can be made that they did.

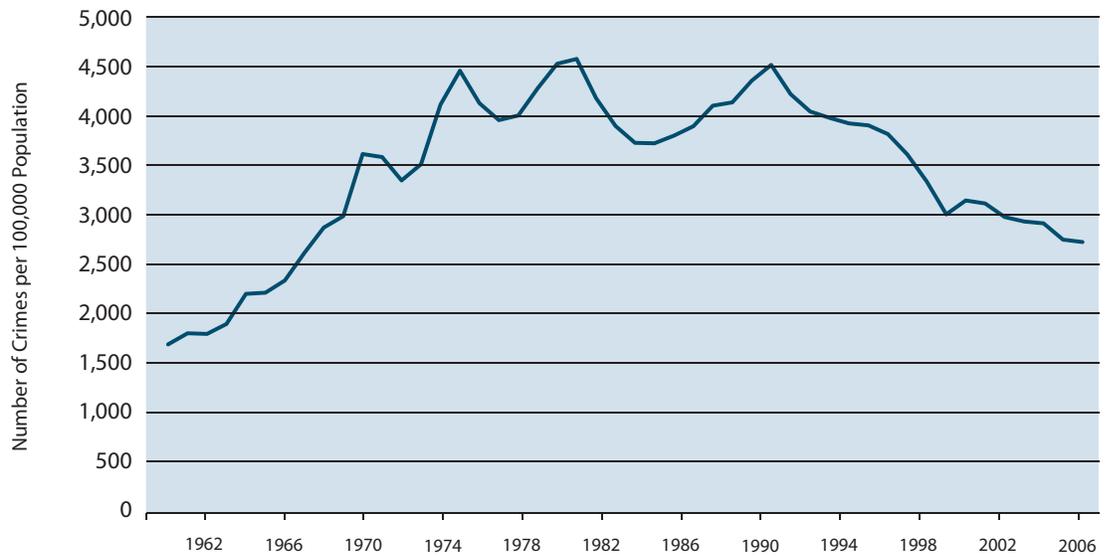
This *News Letter* describes the advance of crime prevention programming as part of Virginia law enforcement strategy and identifies the governmental initiatives that established the Commonwealth as a national leader in crime prevention. It also presents new information from two recent surveys of practitioners: one administered to 241 Virginia crime prevention practitioners on the staffs of 91 law enforcement agencies, and the other to 184 chiefs of police and sheriffs.¹

¹ This *News Letter* presents a synopsis of a larger report. See Virginia Department of Criminal Justice Services, *The Status of Crime Prevention in Virginia* (Richmond, December 31, 2008).



Since the 1970s, Virginia's police and sheriffs' offices have adopted an array of crime prevention programs in order to confront an alarming series of social forces and events.

Figure 1: Virginia Crime Index, 1960 to 2007



Source: FBI Uniform Crime Reports

Different Approaches to Crime Prevention Efforts

There are at least five generally recognized crime prevention strategies:

1. Socio-economic: Governmental policies that ameliorate the broader contributing conditions of crime, such as poverty, unemployment, family disintegration, poor educational resources, neighborhood blight and social discontent.

2. Socialization: Programs that help at-risk juveniles overcome the effects of some of the conditions listed above so they are not as easily drawn to criminal activity. These programs include mentoring, tutoring, after-school programming, truancy and dropout prevention, character and law education, job training and drug awareness and avoidance.

3. Incapacitation: Prosecutorial and judicial policies that confine offenders to prevent their further involvement in criminal behavior.

4. Rehabilitation: Programs to help offenders or other at-risk individuals avoid future criminal behavior. These include juvenile and adult probation, drug treatment, mental health treatment, job training, character education, and offender re-entry programs.

5. Deterrence: Programs and policies that create a fair and effective criminal justice system and those that attempt to increase the difficulty or cost of committing a crime. These include neighborhood and business crime watch groups, use of school resource officers (SROs) in middle and high schools, application of crime prevention through environmental design principles and training citizens to be aware of criminal activity and how to avoid victimization. Most crime prevention efforts of Virginia's law enforcement agencies involve programs that promote deterrence.

Virginia as a Leader in Crime Prevention Programming

Since the 1970s, Virginia's police and sheriffs' offices have adopted an array of crime prevention programs in order to confront an alarming series of social forces and events. These included rapid growth of the crime-prone age cohort of juveniles and younger adults, dramatic increases in violent crime, growth of the drug culture, the rise of gangs and gang warfare, the increased availability of guns, the effects of poverty, blight and social alienation in urban localities, a crack cocaine epidemic, and nationally publicized school shootings such as the Virginia Tech killings in 2007. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 also affected crime prevention strategy.

Congress regularly passed legislation encouraging law enforcement agencies to create policies and programs to address these forces and events. New federal funds were directed to state and local agencies along with provisos that they be spent,

<http://www.dcjs.virginia.gov/cple/documents/2009CrimeInVirginiaReport.pdf> (4/17/09).

The author of this article acknowledges the contributions of Tim Paul, Chief of the DCJS Law Enforcement Services Section, Tami Wyrick, Manager of the DCJS Crime Prevention Center and Rick Arrington, Crime Prevention Center Analyst.

Table 1: Active Crime Prevention Programs Among the 90 Agencies of the Practitioner Sample

Program or Service	Percentage of Programs		Total Agencies Reporting
	Active	Semi-Active	
School resource officers	89	0	87
Regular distribution of prevention information	82	16	89
Neighborhood watch	77	17	87
Law-related education classes for schools	70	15	89
Crime solvers or crime stoppers programs	68	12	85
TRIAD crime prevention program for seniors	64	14	87
National Night Out	56	10	88
School-based anti-bullying programs	55	23	88
Citizen Police Academy	51	5	84
School anger-management programs	48	24	85
School crimesolvers (anonymous reporting)	39	19	83
Business watch/outreach	33	37	87

at least in part, on crime prevention programming. Coincidentally, local agencies increasingly adopted the “community policing” model of law enforcement, which touts a police-citizen partnership as key to the maintenance of order.

Although prevention programming increased in all states, Virginia’s effort has been marked by particular creativity and innovation. Virginia was among the first states to hire state-level employees whose only function was to promote crime prevention and has twice been recognized by the National Crime Prevention Council as having the best state-level crime prevention program in the United States (1989 and 2003). Among other innovations Virginia has been:

- first to establish a state-level governmental unit devoted to prevention;
- first to create a state-level Crime Prevention Center and Center for School Safety; and
- among the first to mandate that public school officials integrate Internet safety lessons in the daily curriculum of students at all grade levels.²

Virginia’s national leadership stems in large measure from the efforts of the Department of Criminal Justice Services and a private, non-profit organization it sponsored, the Virginia Crime Prevention Association. The State Police, the attorney general’s office, and local law enforcement agencies have also made major contributions.

² Most of these innovations are included in a detailed timeline created by Pat Harris, former Executive Director of the Virginia Crime Prevention Association. The timeline may be accessed at www.vcpa.org (3/13/09).

Virginia Crime Prevention Programs

The heart of Virginia prevention efforts lies in the day-to-day administration of specific programs, most of which are sponsored by local police departments and sheriffs’ offices. A recent canvass identified 77 individually named programs. They fall into several broad categories: youth, senior citizens, businesses, at-risk communities, anti-fraud/Internet safety, homeland security/terrorism, and general prevention. For a detailed listing, including examples, see [Appendix Table 1](#).

A recent survey of 90 Virginia police departments and sheriffs’ offices identified the most common types of programs. **Table 1** lists the 12 programs that were classified as currently being “actively” or “semi-actively” sponsored by local agencies.

Most of these are easier to implement because they are less labor- or skill-intensive or they are supported by funding that allows agencies to hire necessary staff and purchase needed program materials. Programs requiring continuous monitoring or coordination efforts were less likely rated “active” and include the publishing of local crime prevention newsletters (26 percent), inter-agency code-enforcement programs (18 percent), speakers’ bureaus (29 percent), and officer-led youth mentoring programs (31 percent). The survey also found that 71 percent of the local agencies created or revived programs between 2003 and 2007, with an average of 2.3 additional programs per agency.

Virginia Crime Prevention in Practice

At least 356 Virginia officers and deputies provide prevention services on a daily basis. This represents approximately 2.1 percent of local law enforce-

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Table 2: Types of Agencies Employing Active Crime Prevention Specialists

Agency	Number of Agencies	Crime Prevention Specialists	
		Number	Percent of Total
Virginia State Police	1	100	28
County police departments	8	84	24
City police departments	22	49	14
County sheriffs' offices	25	55	15
University police departments	7	17	5
Town police departments	12	25	7
City sheriffs' offices	5	8	2
Other agencies	4	18	5
Total	84	356	100

ment officers in the state.³ The exact number of crime prevention practitioners is unknown because the term is not formally defined. Of 165 agencies exercising full policing powers in cities, towns and counties, nearly three-fourths report having full- or part-time practitioners on staff. The remainder say their personnel provide prevention services “as needed.” Forty-six of the agencies say they have specialized Crime Prevention Units, an indication that they employ at least one or more full-time practitioners.

Since 1994, the Department of Criminal Justice Service’s Crime Prevention Center staff has worked to advance the professional status of prevention practitioners through a Crime Prevention Specialist certification program. When it had become apparent that additional and better-trained practitioners were needed, a 1991 Virginia Crime Commission study recommended creation of the program.⁴ The General Assembly passed the enabling legislation in 1993 and the first class of certified Crime Prevention Specialists graduated in 1995.

The program expanded in 2004 to allow any local, state or federal employee serving in a law enforcement or criminal justice capacity to become certified. The certification has greatly increased the credibility and professionalism of Virginia’s practitioners, yet does not preclude agencies from assigning prevention tasks to non-certified employees.

On average, about 48 persons are certified yearly and about 46 specialists are re-certified. Re-certification is required every three years. Currently, there are 356 active specialists serving

in 95 law enforcement agencies, in 25 cities and 43 counties.⁵ **Table 2** shows the types of agencies that employ specialists.

Sixty-seven percent of the specialists are of line-officer rank, 22 percent are corporals or sergeants, 6 percent are lieutenants and higher and 5 percent are civilians. The gender breakdown is 81 percent male and 19 percent female.

As shown in **Figure 2**, localities with the greatest number of crime prevention specialists are the counties of Henrico (with 46) and Fairfax (with 16) and the city of Richmond (with 15). Henrico’s large number reflects the county’s policy of promoting certification for all members of its community policing and school-servicing units.

The Virginia State Police Department also stresses the importance of having prevention specialists on its staff. The agency’s training center offers an intensified crime prevention curriculum for selected troopers in such areas as business security, personal safety, workplace violence, crimes against children, crime prevention for senior citizens and travel safety. This training is designed to keep an estimated 120 or more troopers qualified as specialists.⁶ At least one specialist is assigned to each of the agency’s 48 sub-division areas.

Trooper specialists are only able to devote an estimated 10 percent of their work time to crime prevention, although this varies as a function of geographical location.⁷ They assess the physical

⁵ The number 356 includes 61 Specialists whose certification expired in 2008 and have not, as yet, been re-certified. Active Specialists in agencies such as the Department of Criminal Justice Services or the Virginia Crime Prevention Association are not included in this count.

⁶ The current director, Sgt. Lars Hermann, is on the staff of the Virginia State Police Training Academy in Richmond. He may be contacted at (804) 674-4632.

⁷ Troopers in Central Virginia (Division 1) and Tidewater Virginia (Division 5), two of three heavily populated divisions, dedicate more time because demand for crime prevention services is high in these areas and local law enforcement agencies lack sufficient resources. This contrasts with the other highly

³ According to a 2004 survey by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, Virginia had 21,655 sworn state and local law enforcement officers. The 2.1 percent estimate was derived by dividing 450 by this number. U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, *Bulletin* (June 2007).

⁴ *Analysis of Crimes, Criminals and Cost of Violent Crimes in Convenience Stores*, House Document 30 (1993).

Funding for crime prevention has been haphazard. Nearly every Virginia agency that provides prevention services does so because, at some point, it obtained federal startup money.

learning institutions. It bolsters crime prevention through its ongoing training of Virginia's school resource officers (SROs), the uniformed local law enforcement officers who are assigned to 95 percent of Virginia's high schools and 74 percent of its middle schools. Virginia's 600 SROs seek to intervene in student conflicts before they evolve into criminal incidents, monitor school-based crime-reporting programs, instruct law-related education classes and assist in anti-truancy, anti-drop out, anti-bullying and anti-gang programs. In addition they serve as role models and mentors who demonstrate the art of conflict management.

In 2005, the General Assembly mandated that the center oversee annual security assessments in Virginia's primary and secondary schools. The audits typically involve the physical inspection of each school and the mandatory reporting of prevention related issues. The audits provide a way for center staff to encourage the upgrade of school security policies, the use of prevention principles in the landscaping or renovation of schools, and the standardization of crime reporting. This well-known program methodology is known as "crime prevention through environmental design" (CPTED).

The center also works with the Virginia Department of Education and the University of Virginia on the Virginia High School Safety Study, an ongoing research project that evaluates the effectiveness of school discipline practices and prevention efforts.⁸

In 2007, after the tragic shooting spree at Virginia Tech, the General Assembly established a separate entity to oversee prevention and security efforts on its college and university campuses, the Department of Criminal Justice Services' Office of Campus Policing and Security. That program's OCPS staff are currently gathering detailed information about the crime prevention activities at each campus and are working with experts in the field to develop employment and training criteria for campus security officers.

The Virginia Crime Prevention Association: The association is a non-profit agency that sponsors crime prevention workshops and conferences and provides basic and advanced prevention training. It has been a national leader in getting architects, landscape designers and local planning and zoning officials to apply crime prevention through environmental design principles. The association estimates that its services save local and state law enforcement agencies more than \$300,000 in annual training costs. It has been funded since its

inception by state and federal grants and by private donations.⁹

Office of the Attorney General: The office's most visible program is the TRIAD program, funded by federal Community Oriented Policing Services grants from the National Sheriff's Association. The triad it refers to is the connection among law enforcement, senior citizens, and community groups. The goal of the TRIAD program is to reduce fear of crime and victimization among seniors, increase awareness of scams and frauds targeting seniors, and educate seniors on local and state safety resources. The program operates statewide in cooperation with local law enforcement on topics related to senior safety and security. Other crime prevention activities are described on the office's web site.¹⁰

In 2006, the office started a Gang Reduction and Intervention Program (GRIP), a federally funded program in the city of Richmond. It provides access to services for the families of high-risk youth before they become involved in gang activity. A strong effort is made to refer the youths to recreational options that will lessen the attractiveness of gang participation. To date, GRIP administrators have qualified 50 local programs as anti-gang resource programs and have witnessed a decrease in crime in the program's target area. Because of its success, the program is now being considered for implementation by other localities.

Crime Prevention Funding

Funding for crime prevention has been haphazard. Nearly every Virginia agency that provides prevention services does so because, at some point, it obtained federal startup money. Ever since, it has either acquired more federal money or received support through its local budgeting process. This is particularly true for the funding of prevention personnel.

The availability of federal prevention money has waxed and waned as Congress reacted to a series of crime problems, usually by offering federal money meted out to states and localities in four-year increments. Waves of such money established Neighborhood Watch programs (in the late 1970s and the 1980s), anti-drug programs (in the 1990s), community policing and school resource officer positions (in 1994 and 2005), anti-juvenile delinquency programs (from 1997 to the present)

⁹ More information is available at the Virginia Crime Prevention Association website: www.vcpa.org (3/13/09).

¹⁰ See www.oag.state.va.us (3/13/09). The Office of the Attorney General also promotes crime prevention through its partnerships and programs on domestic violence, Internet safety, methamphetamines addiction and law enforcement mentoring to at-risk youth, etc.

⁸ For more information, visit the Virginia Center for School Safety website: www.dcjs.virginia.gov/vcss/ (5/08/09)

and anti-bullying, anti-gang, senior citizen and homeland security programs in the current decade. Unfortunately, the vitality of these programs often reflects the ebb and flow of these federal dollars.

As of April 2009, the only prevention money included in President Obama's stimulus package is a competitive grant program encouraging "comprehensive, community-based, data-driven approaches for the reduction of violent crime."¹¹ None of this money will come to Virginia unless one of its agencies submits a sufficiently competitive application. No monetary limitations on these anticipated grants have been published.

On the local level, our survey revealed that 40 percent of 114 agencies that exercise full policing powers in Virginia cities, towns and counties have line-item budgets or use discretionary funds in supporting prevention programs (aside from funds for the salaries of prevention staff). Only 23 of the 48 sheriffs or police chiefs reporting, however, could provide estimates of these funds, and these averaged only \$7,023 per agency. The weakness of these data suggests that local prevention budgets are not, as yet, a routine, institutionalized component of Virginia's prevention efforts.

Adequate and reliable funding is, perhaps, the major issue affecting Virginia's crime prevention. The funding problems of the Virginia Crime Prevention Association, the training and technical assistance arm of Virginia's prevention effort, are illustrative. Since its inception, the association has had to rely on a promised stipend or earmark from the General Assembly. Budgetary constraints prevented this appropriation on two occasions, and in each instance funding was switched to a four-year federal grant. As these grants ended, however, its managing agency, the Department of Criminal Justice Services, or the Department of Planning and Budget, acted to eliminate these funds in response to the Governor's request for budget cuts. A third federal grant was approved after an eleventh hour appeal in June 2008.

The commonwealth's contribution to prevention funding includes \$10.4 million¹² for new school resource officer positions (2000 to the present), an estimated \$700,000 in support of the Virginia Crime Prevention Association and general revenue for the hiring of state-level prevention staff. The General Assembly also created the

Community Policing Fund, whose revenue is generated from donations that taxpayers contribute when filing state income tax returns. A total of \$103,875 has been awarded to 27 police departments and 16 sheriffs' offices through this fund.¹³ Given the importance of crime prevention to the safety of its citizens, Virginia must expand and enhance its proactive and supportive role in this key policy area.

The Future of Virginia Crime Prevention

The surveys of sheriffs, police chiefs and crime prevention practitioners revealed a second and equally significant concern about Virginia crime prevention: a general insecurity about knowing the relative effectiveness of local crime prevention programs. Specialists found it difficult to assess this because there are no accepted ways of measuring program performance. Until measures of program activity and performance are created, the whole discussion of crime prevention will remain frustratingly imprecise.¹⁴

The relative newness and lack of reliable information about prevention programs has thwarted attempts to evaluate their effectiveness. State officials should consider forming a commission whose mission would be to establish model policies for Virginia's prevention programs. Such a commission could help promote inter-agency information sharing, standardized terminology and statewide collection of crime prevention data. It could develop "best practices" procedures and encourage the involvement of university research in program analysis.

Probably very few people—aside from criminals—oppose crime prevention efforts that are proven successful, cost-effective and constitutionally valid. If successful crime prevention is to become a permanent part of Virginia law-enforcement strategy, this important but constantly evolving field deserves the full attention of our citizens and policymakers.

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¹¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs' (OJP), Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA), Recovery Act Edward Byrne Memorial Competitive Grant Program. See <http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/-BJA/recovery/RecoveryByrne.pdf> (3/31/09)

¹² The figures cited in this section were obtained from the Grants Administration Section of the Department of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS).

¹³ DCJS grants administration records.

¹⁴ This imprecision was documented by Lawrence W. Sherman, et. al. in "Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising," National Institute of Justice: *Research in Brief*, July 1998.

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/nij/pubs-sum/171676.htm> (3/13/09).

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Appendix Table 1: Types of Virginia Law Enforcement Crime Prevention Programs

Client or Type	Examples of Programs
Youth	
School	School resource officers in middle and high-schools, truancy prevention, anger management, anonymous tip lines, anti-bullying, event planning, DARE (drug and alcohol and violence prevention in elementary and middle schools)
Anti-gang	Officer-instructed gang awareness classes, gang membership prevention programs
At-risk juveniles	Youth mentoring, summer camps, after-school education and recreation programs
Early childhood	McGruff Safe Houses (protection from domestic violence): camps; bike and pedestrian safety
Senior citizens	Anti-fraud programs and education about scams
Businesses	Security assessments of facilities, employee awareness, construction site theft prevention, workplace violence prevention
At-risk communities	Public housing crime watch, Hispanic community programs and an immigrant outreach program, domestic violence programs, anti-rape and self-defense classes
Anti-fraud/internet safety	Computer and phone scam awareness, identity theft, Internet safety
Homeland security/terrorism	Automated Critical Asset Management System (records floor plans and inventory data on key infrastructures to facilitate generation of pre-incident operational plans for local police and first responders); buffer zone protection planning (buys equipment to extend the zone of protection beyond the gates of critical facilities), community emergency response team (CERT), citizen corps, city employees on patrol, general aviation security programs, and threat assessment of large and small facilities
General prevention	
Citizen outreach	Watch programs (neighborhood, church, highway, fleet, wildlife), citizen police academies (train citizen helpers), crime solvers (anonymous tip lines), literature distribution, National Night Out (community crime awareness program sponsored by the National Association of Town Watch), state police crush crime, anti-crime speakers bureau, self-defense classes, anti-fraud/internet safety presentations, state police Help Eliminate Auto Theft (HEAT) program
“Target hardening”	Crime prevention through better environmental design such as street lighting, vehicle identification number etching, home security assessments, neighborhood code enforcement
Agency cooperation	Crime prevention training, interagency cooperation, improved local crime data systems

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