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BUILDING A SAFE, JUST
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Tackling Theft with the Market Reduction Approach

Mike Sutton, Jacqueline Schneider and
Sarah Hetherington

Crime Reduction Research Series Paper 8

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).

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Crime Reduction Research Series

The Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (PRCU) is based in the Research, Development and Statistics (RDS) Directorate of the Home Office. The Unit carries out and commissions social and management science research on policing and crime reduction, to support Home Office aims and develop evidence-based policy and practice.

The Crime Reduction Research Series presents research findings and guidance material relevant to practitioners involved in crime reduction at the local level, and particularly the local crime and disorder partnerships. The series will include work funded under the Government's Crime Reduction Programme as well as other relevant RDS work.

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Foreword

The Market Reduction Approach (MRA) is an interagency approach that is designed to reduce theft. This report builds upon earlier Home Office research that first created and developed the MRA. The Home Office report 'Handling stolen goods and theft: A market reduction approach' (Sutton 1998) stimulated considerable interest and has influenced a number of interagency projects and police operations against stolen goods markets. The study identified 5 main markets for stolen goods, described their characteristics and recommended various MRA tactics to tackle them to reduce theft. That earlier study also revealed how the relationship between theft and stolen goods markets, and between fences and thieves and the buying public, cannot be properly understood by the simple concept of demand leading to supply by theft. In many cases, it is thieves who create markets by continually offering stolen goods to shopkeepers and other members of the public. And yet, common knowledge about how to sell stolen goods locally and where to sell them almost certainly plays an important role in motivating thieves in the first place.

The full MRA model, presented for the first time in this report, builds upon our earlier research and offers a strategic, systematic and routine problem-solving framework for action against the roots of theft. This report will serve as an invaluable guide for interagency partnerships wishing to tackle stolen goods markets.

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This report contains general information about planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation that will serve as a valuable guide for both long-term interagency initiatives and smaller-scale police operations against specific types of market, thieves and dealers in stolen goods.

The thinking behind the Market Reduction Approach

Selling stolen goods is a criminal offence under the Theft Act of 1968. Such illegal trading frequently breaches administrative regulations affecting health and safety, the environment, planning, income tax and VAT. Stolen goods markets can be tackled through interagency partnerships including the police, local authorities, The Benefits Agency, Housing Associations, Customs and Excise, Department of the Environment, Inland Revenue and Trading Standards. The Market Reduction Approach (MRA) aims to hamper the ability of thieves to cultivate new markets, while continuously attempting to disrupt existing illegal trading. As an interagency approach, MRA strategies, objectives, and tactics should be devised and agreed by all partners at the local level.

Crime analysis for reducing stolen goods markets

Although police officers routinely interview arrested thieves about their modus operandi, they do not usually ask detailed questions about how they actually sell stolen goods. The *ERASOR* (Extra Routine And Systematic Opportunistic Research) process involves asking specific questions about stolen goods markets whenever the opportunity arises.

The ERASOR process can be summarised as follows:

- a) Perform traditional crime data analysis in the local area to identify “hot products” and associated theft problems
- b) Perform extra analysis to see what illegal goods markets are operant and exactly how, when, and where they exist
- c) Use crime mapping with stolen goods markets specifically in mind
- d) Prioritise markets to target
- e) Devise a strategy to undermine the targeted markets

- f) Devise specific tactics, including crackdowns, publicity, discussion with citizens and organisations, use of community policing resources, and community safety partnerships
- g) Put tactics into practice, adjusting as new information unfolds
- h) Monitor changes in stolen goods markets and theft patterns, including the types of goods stolen, sold, or appearing at suspect sites, as well as information from offenders, police, and visible evidence of offender behaviour
- i) Review, learn, and consolidate for use in this and other local settings

ERASOR information provides useful intelligence about market conditions at the start of an MRA project and continues to provide information about market changes. This information is particularly useful for deciding upon local strategies and tactics for tackling stolen goods markets.

Strategic planning for reducing stolen goods markets

It is particularly important to have a strategic plan to ensure that a project team adopts, and continues to use, a routine and systematic approach to both crime pattern analysis and the crime prevention process. The aim is to empower team members to make authoritative and informed decisions, jointly as necessary, with other agencies regarding what crimes to tackle, the most suitable types of crime reduction schemes to use and where they should be implemented.

MRA – general strategic guidelines

Research has consistently shown that local problems require local, tailor-made solutions that are best designed by *working in partnership with other local agencies*. Recommendations to assist strategic planning for MRA projects include:

- appoint someone with responsibilities for continually monitoring aspects of the implementation and, where possible, the impact of the project
- define success and measures by which success is to be judged
- after each market crackdown, consolidate any successful crime reduction by implementing longer term tactics to address the underlying problems that led to the need for a crackdown in the first place
- use Section 27 of the Theft Act of 1968 to discourage prolific thieves and handlers from dealing in stolen goods

Theft reduction strategy for reducing stolen goods markets

The general theory of the MRA – *that reducing dealing in stolen goods will reduce motivation to steal* – means that all MRA theft reduction strategies will begin with the following 2 aims:

- instil an appreciation among thieves that transporting, storing, and selling stolen goods has become at least as risky as it is to steal goods in the first place
- make buying, dealing and consuming stolen goods appreciably more risky for all those involved

MRA planning tactics

Reducing trade in the 5 main markets for stolen goods (Sutton 1998) will require a variety of tactics:

In both *Commercial Fence Supplies and Commercial Sales Markets*, investigative and preventive efforts should focus on thieves and fences – because here there are no ‘innocent’ consumers. Attention should be focused upon ‘crime facilitators’, such as business people who buy stolen goods, so that the ‘crime facilitators’ and the thieves who supply them will need to invest more effort and face greater risks if they want to convert stolen property into cash. This might be achieved through adopting the following measures:

- use existing intelligence and ERASOR information to identify which shops and businesses thieves visit in order to sell stolen goods
- seek to implement local legislation requiring traders to require proof of identity, and to keep records of the name and address, of anyone who sells them second-hand goods
- use test-selling to see if businesses are complying with new codes of practice
- utilise interagency support to crackdown on any irregularities committed by businesses known to deal in stolen goods

Residential Fence Supplies markets could be reduced through identifying and arresting residential fences. Some residential fences also deal in drugs, which is not surprising since research shows that theft is a common way to fund drug abuse. Therefore, it might be worth combining efforts to reduce local illicit drug markets with schemes aimed at reducing stolen goods markets. Such an approach would tackle fundamental causes of serious theft:

- use existing and ERASOR information to find out who the drug dealers and fences are, who they deal with and how they operate

- use mobile CCTV cameras and surveillance teams to gather evidence by observing the homes of known or suspected residential fences
- utilise interagency partners such as housing associations and local authority housing departments to evict those illegally trading out of residential addresses

Network Sales Markets might be reduced by the following measures:

- arrest any residential fences known to be involved in wider dealing networks
- use media campaigns to implement local 'rule setting' schemes to remove any ambiguity in what is and is not acceptable behaviour at the local area level
- run publicity campaigns to discourage people from buying stolen goods and encourage the reporting of persons who do so to police or Crime Stoppers hotlines.

Consumers may be 'innocent' when they buy in Commercial Supplies Markets, but they are not so 'innocent' when they buy goods cheaply in pubs or at their doorstep. In these *Hawking Markets*, surveillance measures might work well alongside tactics aimed at increasing awareness of the consequences of buying stolen goods. Some suggestions for tactics include:

- analyse ERASOR information and existing criminal intelligence information to identify the housing estates and pubs where hawkers frequently sell stolen goods
- set up special telephone hotlines, or work with Crime Stoppers, to invite the public to inform on pubs and clubs where hawking is taking place
- arrest hawkers and their customers

If MRA tactics are implemented, they should help to reduce the motivation to steal, or at the very least, slow thieves down.

Marketing the MRA

The MRA uses marketing techniques to inform offenders and the wider public that there will be an increased risk involved in selling and buying stolen goods. These techniques should discourage thieves as they will get a lower price and it will be harder to sell because buyers of stolen goods will be deterred. This deterrent method could be termed 'risk projection' because it seeks to make offenders reduce or cease particular types of offending because they feel that there is a greater risk of being caught and prosecuted.

Monitoring MRA tactics

Monitoring is not optional. It is crucial because failure to implement a project as planned is one of the most common causes of failure. Monitoring can reveal implementation problems and inform decisions about how to fix them. It is also essential for keeping track of the various sources of information about stolen goods markets and to follow-up what happens to this information to ensure that valuable information is being acted upon. Monitoring the flow of information, and the action it generates, will serve to record measures of success that can be attributed to particular elements of the project. Measures of success will include the number of successful prosecutions and fencing outlets closed down.

Consolidating after the MRA crackdowns

The crackdown and consolidation cycle is a complementary process. When monitoring reveals a significant rise in a particular pattern of crime, police crackdowns should be implemented to address the situation. On-going analyses will determine when there is a need for further crackdown efforts. Efforts should be taken to consolidate the successes of each crackdown by addressing the underlying causes of the crime problem.

The following consolidation tactics might work to help reduce the underlying conditions that allow stolen goods markets thrive:

- encourage re-cycling of legitimate second hand goods that might otherwise be thrown away or stored
- recycle recovered, but unclaimed, stolen goods retrieved from crackdown operations
- recycle recovered goods that are unwanted by the insurance industry or by other police forces
- seek to reduce shoplifting since research shows that this type of offending often serves as an entry point in criminal careers and also leads to trading in stolen goods markets - which then encourages further offending
- work with the business community to design and implement competitive marketing strategies to undermine stolen goods markets

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Background

There has been little research to date on the role of thieves, fences, and consumers in the overall redistribution of stolen goods. Since burglary and theft are considered such important social problems, it is odd that these factors have been so neglected by criminologists (see however, Klockars 1974; Walsh 1976, 1977; Maguire 1982; Steffensmeier 1986; Cromwell and McElrath 1994). To address the need for further research, the Home Office since 1993 has undertaken pioneering research on stolen goods markets (see Clarke 1999; Kock et al. 1996; Sutton 1993, 1995, 1998). Following the publication of the first systematic research in this area (Sutton 1998), the Market Reduction Approach (MRA) was recommended as a potentially useful strategy for tackling theft. In essence, the MRA is designed to tackle theft by reducing the number of outlets for stolen goods.

Selling stolen goods is a criminal offence under the Theft Act of 1968. Such illegal trading frequently breaches administrative regulations affecting health and safety, the environment, planning, revenue and VAT. Stolen goods markets can be tackled through interagency partnerships including the police, local authorities, The Benefits Agency, Housing Associations, Customs and Excise, Department of the Environment, Inland Revenue and Trading Standards. The MRA aims to hamper the ability of thieves to cultivate new markets, while continuously attempting to disrupt existing illegal trading. As an interagency approach, MRA strategies, objectives, and tactics should be devised and agreed by all partners at the local level.

There has been considerable interest from various police forces wishing to implement MRA projects and a number of operations and projects have been started. This report suggests what a MRA project should be like. It is based upon lessons the authors have learned while advising and working alongside various police forces in the UK and USA.

The report aims to provide guidance for current and future theft reduction initiatives, and particularly to serve as a guide for the planning, implementation and monitoring of interagency projects against stolen goods markets. Further information is provided for smaller-scale police tactical operations against illegal markets of all kinds. It can be used as a guide to begin designing market reduction initiatives against drugs markets, illegal gambling, illegal markets for tobacco and alcohol, counterfeit goods, illegal firearms markets, trafficking in humans, child-pornography, markets for medicinal/ornamental/fashion products from endangered species, and street level prostitution problems.

Situational crime prevention

Predictability of offender behaviour is the enemy of crime. Only when it is known what type of crime is likely to happen, how it will happen, and where it is most likely to happen, is it possible to be really effective in stopping it. The Situational Crime Prevention Approach builds upon what is predictable about the situations where crime occurs. The MRA utilises this well-established approach by treating the existence of stolen goods markets as a main motivational factor behind theft.

Situational crime prevention involves the deployment of discrete managerial and environmental change to reduce the opportunities for crimes to occur and is particularly useful for designing solutions to prevent specific crime problems in places where they usually happen (Clarke 1997). The MRA builds on this by looking at the different markets for stolen goods and then undertaking routine and systematic intelligence gathering to find out who is dealing in those markets and how they operate. By using an array of police tactics and interagency interventions, to disrupt and reduce each type of market for stolen goods, the MRA aims to make stealing and dealing in stolen goods more difficult and risky, and therefore a less attractive way to make money.

A brief history of the MRA

The name 'Market Reduction Approach' was first used in the Home Office Handling Study (Sutton 1998). This study introduced a number of questions in the nationally representative British Crime Survey (BCS), which asked about buying and selling stolen goods. The BCS results revealed that a large number of people are offered and buy stolen goods. In 1994, 11 percent of respondents said that they had been offered stolen goods in the previous year. A further 11 percent admitted buying stolen goods in the past five years, whilst 70 percent thought that at least some of their neighbours had purchased stolen goods for use in their homes, and 21 percent thought a lot of their neighbours had done the same. The Youth Lifestyle Survey (Graham and Bowling 1995) found that handling stolen goods was the most prevalent offence with 49 percent of people aged 14 to 25, who had admitted offending in the past year, admitting that they had handled stolen goods during the same period.

Probing the dynamics of stolen goods markets, the Handling Study conducted in-depth interviews with thieves, fences and consumers of stolen goods. These interviews revealed the key role that stolen goods markets play in motivating people to steal. The interviews also revealed that inexperienced thieves tend to rely on existing markets, usually a single residential fence who is either a relative or neighbour, while experienced and prolific thieves – particularly frequent drug users – are more proactive in finding new buyers and sell to a variety of people. This is the way that experienced and prolific thieves overcome local fluctuations in demand for stolen goods. They are able to sell quickly, even if they are not in close proximity to their usual buyers, thus minimising risk of arrest by only transporting stolen goods short distances and storing them for brief periods.

Markets for stolen goods, in many cases, provide motivation for initial and continuing involvement in crime. Some inexperienced burglars fail to sell goods stolen from their first burglaries and consequently they give up stealing after two or three attempts. Other burglars, however, are able successfully to convert stolen property into cash at their first attempt; not surprisingly they tend to repeat the criminal acts that reward them with money. This is an important area for crime prevention. Reducing markets for stolen goods might help to ground many criminal careers before they can properly begin.

Although the Handling Study found that particularly active fences tend to encourage thieves to increase their offending, it was revealed that stolen goods markets are mainly fuelled by thieves offering goods for sale, rather than by proactive demand from dealers. It is the offers to sell stolen goods that have a major influence on the way that stolen goods markets operate. If dealers and consumers do not actively seek out stolen goods, then they need to be offered goods in order to be able 'knowingly' to buy them.

Few buyers actively seek out thieves in order to buy stolen goods. Rather, it is more usual for thieves, with stolen goods for sale, to approach fences, businessmen and other members of the public. Stealing-to-order does go on, and the practice is quite widespread, but it is not as common as what should, perhaps, be called 'stealing-to-offer'. Knowledge about the importance of stealing-to-offer was first used to create an initial menu of situational tactics recommended for the MRA (Sutton 1998). The original menu has been further developed through discussions with groups of police officers from several police forces and other agencies.

The Handling Study identified five main types of market for stolen goods:

- **commercial fence supplies** – are where stolen goods are sold by thieves to commercial fences (e.g. jewellers, pawnbrokers, second-hand dealers) operating out of shops;
- **residential fence supplies** – involve the sale of stolen goods (particularly electrical goods) from thieves to fences, usually at the home of a fence;
- **network sales** – often involve a residential fence. The buyer may be the final consumer, or may sell the goods on again through friendship networks - where stolen goods are passed on and each participant adds a little to the price until a consumer is found;
- **commercial sales** – are sales of stolen goods by commercial fences for a profit - either directly to the (innocent) consumer or to another distributor who thinks the goods can be sold again for additional profit. More rarely, such sales are made to another distributor; and
- **hawking** – occurs when thieves sell directly to consumers in places like pubs and clubs, or door-to-door (e.g. shoplifters selling clothes or food).

Efforts to reduce one market will not necessarily have a similar effect on another type of market. Successful intervention tactics are most likely to be those that are market specific. Similarly, tactics that work on one type of market in a particular location may not have the same effects in another, which means that tactics may need to be fine-tuned for local conditions. While it is possible to suggest general approaches to achieve a reduction in dealing in different types of market, it will almost certainly be necessary to design and implement local solutions to tackle the particular characteristics of local markets. Using the criminal justice system may not be the most effective way to reduce stolen goods markets. In some cases, it might be more cost effective to remove particular underlying conditions that allow stolen goods markets to flourish. Agencies such as Trading Standards, Planning, Customs & Excise, and those regulating benefits and housing might have a greater and longer lasting effect – through cracking down on unlicensed trading and invoking other administrative powers to stop irregular business activities.

Testing the MRA

There has been great interest in the MRA and this report describes the latest developments in methods to tackle stolen goods markets. While the thinking behind the MRA is straightforward, logical and appears to have great crime reducing potential, it is at this stage an innovative crime reducing philosophy. The MRA has been adopted in several projects funded under the Government's Crime Reduction Programme. Therefore, within the next three years these projects will undergo independent evaluations on the cost and benefits and also of the way in which this innovative approach was implemented in each area.

The MRA model is based on the core principles that are at the heart of Intelligence-Led Policing (ILP), Problem-Oriented Policing, and in part, Zero Tolerance Policing. Therefore, the MRA is suitable for all policing models.

With an aim to reduce theft, the MRA model identifies the following steps that should be taken to reduce the number of stolen goods markets within an area:

- Gather information on local stolen goods markets
- Analyse the information to determine which of the five types of stolen goods market (Sutton 1998) are operating; how those markets are operating; and who is involved
- Devise a plan to reduce the most significant market(s) in operation
- Implement the plan
- Evaluate the outcome
- Revise the plan in accordance with any market changes

The general theory of the MRA – *that reducing dealing in stolen goods will reduce motivation to steal* – means that all MRA theft reduction strategies will begin with the following two strategic aims:

1. Instil an appreciation among thieves that selling, transporting and storing stolen goods has become at least as risky as it is to steal the goods in the first place

2. Make buying, dealing and consuming stolen goods appreciably more risky for all those involved

To achieve these aims, the MRA sets out to reduce:

- the number of offers made to potential buyers
- the number of outlets for stolen goods
- the number of thieves and handlers by encouraging them to explore non-criminal alternatives, rather than just alternative crimes

The model proposes that these objectives can be achieved by cracking down on stolen goods markets with a programme of carefully co-ordinated tactical operations, and then consolidating any success with longer-term strategies to tackle the things that help stolen goods markets to take hold and thrive.

The effect of offers to sell stolen goods is particularly important for the way stolen goods markets operate. If dealers and consumers do not seek out stolen goods, then accepting offers is the only other way they can knowingly buy them. The MRA aims to reduce the number of offers made to buyers and increase resistance to offers when they do occur. The approach is designed to increase the risks for thieves at the point of sale – to make them equal or greater than the risks faced when stealing.

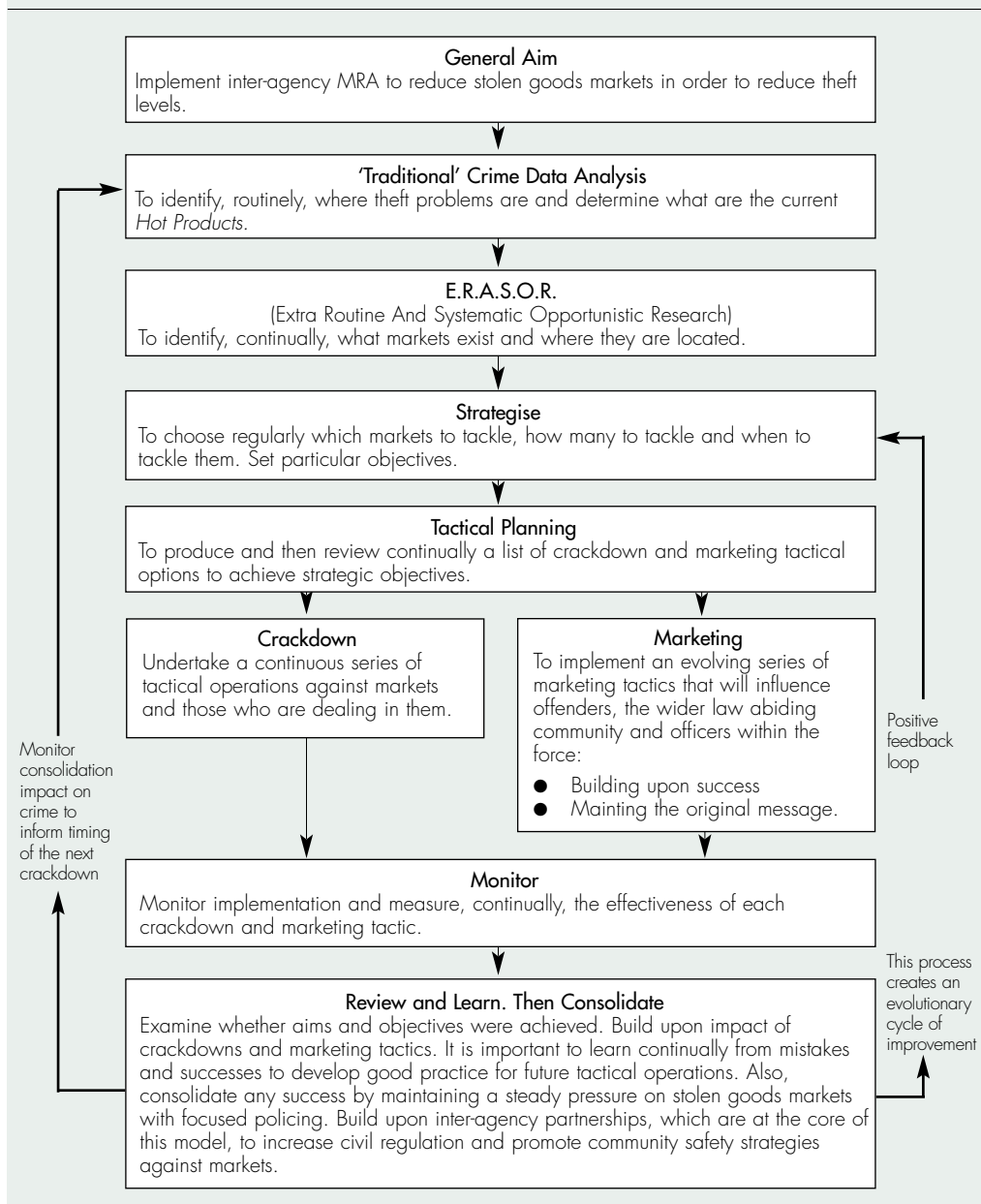
The various markets - their thieves, dealers and consumers – need to be monitored to determine whether they should be tackled simultaneously or in turn. This will help to maximise crime reduction and also limit any opportunities for displacement of dealing activity from one market type to another.

Many of the elements in the MRA model (Figure 1) are designed to be in a continual state of flux. This means that the MRA is a dynamic, rather than a simple linear, model. For example, research and strategy, marketing and monitoring are all meant to take place simultaneously to influence each crackdown operation that takes place. The intention is that all of the elements in the model should become the **routine** way of policing within the MRA. The positive feedback loop in Figure 1 represents a process that enables strategies and tactics continually to progress once a cycle of evolution is underway.

Flexible and lateral thinking

It seems that there is a very good case for maintaining flexibility in proactive policing. Otherwise, to stick slavishly to just one of the two main types of proactive policing would be far too constraining. When all is said and done, good proactive policing involves seeking out the underlying causes of particular problems, then developing and utilising evidence-based practice to achieve cost-effective solutions. This probably is the most helpful way to begin thinking about how various proactive policing philosophies really ought to be used to reduce crime. The MRA could be termed a 'lateral strategy' because it aims to reduce markets using lateral thinking to tackle the root causes of theft. This lateral strategy depends on strategic planning to decide which markets to tackle, when, and how to tackle them.

Figure 1: The MRA interagency model – a research and strategy-led system



3. Traditional crime analysis and ERASOR - the Extra Routine And Systematic Opportunistic Research process

Traditional routine crime analysis for reducing stolen goods markets

It is essential to begin a MRA project with traditional, routine crime pattern analysis. There are many ways to look at crime patterns. Crime can be looked at in terms of incidence (the number of times it occurs in a given period) or prevalence (whether it occurs at all in a given period). It can be displayed in tabular or graph form, with rates and percentages, or it can be displayed on a map to show where it is occurring and how frequently.

Mapping crime requires the combined use of computer systems, mapping software and geographically referenced crime data with crime data analysis software. While it is beyond the scope of this publication to provide detailed advice on crime mapping, many police forces have expertise in this area and there are a number of publications that provide detailed advice on appropriate methods (see Hirschfield and Bowers 2001)

Mapping can assist police efforts to control and prevent crime by revealing the type and volume of crime in particular geographic areas. For example, crime maps can be used to show exactly where thefts are taking place and where particular types of goods are being stolen. This helps to identify more easily the places that are most in need of specific crime reduction tactics. In the first instance, it is usually most useful to undertake simple pinpoint analysis. Using domestic burglary as an example, this is best done by using a Geographic Information System (GIS) which can plot all burglaries on a map over a 12 month period to show where this type of crime is most prevalent. Provided the data are available, the next step is to produce a more detailed map to show where burglaries are most concentrated, particularly where repeat burglaries occur.

At the start of an MRA project, it will be necessary to prepare a knowledge base about local theft problems. The entire interagency team should identify, as soon as possible, what items are most frequently stolen in the local area and from where they are being stolen. With such data, interagency decision-makers will be in a stronger position to make informed, strategic choices about the area where the project is likely to achieve the most cost-effective impact on local theft problems.

Routine and systematic gathering and analysis of information about stolen goods markets is a core feature of the MRA model. Crime pattern analysis plays a key part in this process. Where possible, analysis should be undertaken of data covering the three years before implementing the MRA – as this will reduce the likelihood of making decisions that are based upon temporary and uncharacteristic peaks or troughs in crime figures (see Ekblom, Law and Sutton 1996).

Mapping the proximity of stolen goods markets

The routine and systematic gathering and analysis of information will give decision-makers a clear idea as to where specific property is stolen from and where stolen property is recovered. It can also give an indication of the routes between locations of victimisation and the places of disposal. Such data will provide the opportunity to hypothesise how the local markets operate.

Research shows that thieves generally prefer to sell their goods locally (Langworthy and Lebau 1992; Sutton 1998). Therefore, if a local area is found to suffer disproportionately from thefts of electrical goods, this might be sustained by the nearby presence of a locally thriving market for stolen electrical goods. Such local markets might be pawnshops, second hand outlets and/or residential fencing networks. To complement theft and market maps, the location of residences of known thieves and fences should also be mapped to provide geographic information about individuals who are likely to be stealing and dealing in stolen goods in and around the vicinity of particular burglary and theft hot spots.

Routine crime analysis should be used to identify:

- where particular types of theft are most frequently happening
- places where these thefts are most concentrated
- what is being stolen
- the value of goods stolen
- the places stolen goods are recovered
- the extent of recovery of stolen goods

Avoiding the administrative area fallacy

When undertaking preliminary theft analysis, it is particularly important to bear in mind that police beats do not always represent locally named and known 'places'. Beats are often nothing more than administrative boundaries with little or no resemblance to 'real areas'. Unlike beats, named housing areas are distinct places with particular social and physical characteristics that set them apart in the minds of offenders and the whole local community.

When looking to see where crime prevention resources should be spent, it is a common mistake to begin by looking for the police beat with the most crime. By way of example, a police force may have two large housing estates within their jurisdiction. Estate A has the

highest burglary rate. It is also divided into several distinct police beats. Estate B has a lower burglary rate than Estate A, however Estate B is wholly contained in one specific police beat. If burglary data are analysed by beat, the most problematic burglary area will be incorrectly identified. Estate B will undoubtedly be seen as having the highest incidence of burglary simply because Estate A's problems have been divided, for whatever reason, into several beats. The lesson to be learned from this simple scenario is that the beat with the most crime may not be in fact the place that has the most crime. Therefore, it is preferable to begin to analyse crime by using local knowledge of neighbourhoods to define real geographical areas and not to use administrative boundaries such as police beats. Other frequently used administrative areas are enumeration districts or electoral wards and the same rules should apply to these.

Supplementing theft data with other information

To prepare the ground for a MRA project it is important to make maximum use of any existing information about thieves, handlers and markets. Project managers should build up a picture of the local theft problem by finding out as much as possible about local thieves, dealers in stolen goods and where particular types of stolen goods are bought and sold. According to Hough and Tilley (1998b), existing crime audits will provide valuable information. The project team should be continuously monitoring what others are doing in the local area to tackle burglary, theft, handlers and markets for stolen goods. It is also necessary to account for the likely impact of future police operations and projects that are planned against thieves, stolen goods dealers and markets for stolen goods in the local area. This is important for evaluation purposes. If other operations run concurrently, it is necessary to disentangle the effects of one programme from another. This reduces the potential for making false claims of success.

Using the ERASOR process to reduce markets for stolen goods

In the previous section, Figure 1 showed how the *ERASOR* process provides an essential component of the MRA. The acronym *ERASOR* stands for Extra Routine And Systematic Opportunistic Research. This process involves undertaking additional (extra), routine, and proactive research to identify which types of stolen goods markets exist in particular areas and where they are located and how they operate. It is particularly important to note that the opportunistic element of *ERASOR* involves taking advantage of every available chance to seek out information about stolen goods markets and the people who are dealing in them. *ERASOR* is part of what makes the MRA distinct from traditional police practices. *ERASOR* leads to the collection of more data, and a different type of data, compared to that which officers gather traditionally.

Expanding the boundaries of traditional policing techniques, the MRA seeks to develop a systematic and routine way of collecting *ERASOR* information. Table 1 outlines the various sources of information available for police and their interagency partners to use in order to identify the stolen goods markets operating within their locality. Qualitative interviewing is a major component of *ERASOR* data collection. This type of interviewing is significantly different from interviewing techniques that are used to gather evidence for criminal prosecutions. Rather, an approach designed to gather a specific type of local intelligence information is required.

Intelligence gathering of this kind requires a comfortable, trusting, and mutually beneficial exchange between the person asking the questions and the person responding. The interviewee must not feel threatened or intimidated in the interview. Prior to commencing with the formal interview, the interviewee should be told the nature of the questions, how the information might be used, and that it is not necessary to give identifying details about specific individuals or about specific crimes that have been committed or are being planned.

Table 1. Seeking ERASOR information

Qualitative interviews with offenders*	Qualitative interviews with police officers	Qualitative interviews with prisoners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Burglars • Other thieves, including shoplifters • Dealers • Drug users <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The purpose is to gain information on current market conditions from offenders' perspective ➤ Conduct interviews on a quarterly basis to monitor changes in markets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the MRA project area • In areas surrounding the MRA project <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The purpose is to gather information on markets from a cross section of officers ➤ Conduct interviews on a quarterly basis ➤ Questionnaires could be distributed to all police sections at quarterly intervals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Convicted of burglary • Convicted of other theft offences, including shoplifters • Convicted of handling • Convicted of illegal drug use or dealing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The purpose is to gain information on current market conditions from offenders' perspective ➤ Conduct interviews on a quarterly basis to monitor changes in markets
Qualitative interviews with informants	Qualitative interviews with shop keepers	Anonymous crime reporting
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informants registered with the police <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The purpose is to gain information on stealing and dealing activities of thieves, handlers and drug users ➤ Conduct interviews on a regular basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek information from those with histories of handling • Target those suspected of handling • Seek assistance from legitimate dealers to gain information about the illegitimate dealers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The purpose is to gain information on stolen goods markets from those dealing in goods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime Stoppers • MRA Internet website • MRA specific hotline <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The purpose is to give the public alternative methods to report suspicious behaviour

*Known or suspected

Table 1. Seeking ERASOR information (continued)

Qualitative interviews with the public	Crime mapping/related data	Routine intelligence sources
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With victims of burglary about property stolen and repeat victimisation • With neighbours of residential fences* • Ask about knowledge of MRA tactics • Ask about knowledge of stolen goods markets <p>➤ The purpose is to discover what the public knows about stolen goods markets</p> <p>➤ Victims provide detailed information about the goods that are being targeted by thieves</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Places of all types of disposal, including sales, storage, and dumping • Places of all types of theft • Ranking of “Hot Property” • Descriptions of what is being stolen from different locations • Areas of repeat burglary victimisation • Lists of all known/suspected handlers & places of residence, employment, and their associates • Lists of all shop keepers in area who deal in stolen goods* <p>➤ The purpose is to gather supply and demand information about stolen goods markets</p> <p>➤ The purpose is to look at the relationships between individual thieves, dealers and places of disposal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police sources • MRA partners information <p>➤ The purpose is to tap into various sources of complimentary information</p>

*Known or suspected

In ideal circumstances, an experienced and suitably qualified social scientist should be used to conduct interviews to gather general market intelligence. It must be remembered that these interviews are *not* conducted to gain evidence for prosecution; rather they are to develop an understanding about local stolen goods markets. As the project develops, it is used to monitor possible changes in market conditions over time.

The type of information collected in these interviews will be dependent on the targeted population. For example, the questions posed to burglars or drug users will be different from those asked of shopkeepers. Separate interview schedules should be made for different types of respondents. Respondents can be:

- suspected/known thieves, burglars, handlers, drug users
- convicted thieves, burglars, handlers, drug users
- victims of burglaries, including repeat victims
- neighbours of suspected/known residential fences
- registered informants¹
- shopkeepers and publicans
- police officers from various units with the force
- relevant interagency partners

General market intelligence interviews should be conducted on a quarterly basis. The aggregate intelligence data derived from these interviews will assist the police and other interagency partners to decide upon strategies and tactics. The data will also assist the MRA project team in monitoring the effects that operational tactics are having on stolen goods markets and how the existing market structure is changing due to project initiatives. For example, the interviews may reveal that certain stolen goods were sold at corner shops (see Walsh 1976), prior to specific tactics being implemented, but that because of those tactics thieves switched to selling in certain pubs, or to residential fences.

If police and interagency partners employ an independent social scientist to conduct qualitative interviews, it is important that the project team agrees research protocols². The agreement should include a document containing explicit interview “dos” and “don’ts.” The following suggestions are not definitive because researchers and MRA project teams should design the exact contents of their research protocols.

Recommended items for general market intelligence interview protocols:

Do:

- explain why the interview is taking place
- explain that no personal information or information on specific crimes should be divulged in order to guarantee anonymity to the interviewee
- explain that if a planned crime is identified against a specific person, group of persons or other target, then it will be reported to the proper authorities

¹ There may be real or perceived difficulties concerning confidentiality with an independent social scientist having contact with registered informants, therefore decisions will have to be made on a case-by-case basis.

² The authors are grateful to Detective Superintendent Clive Harding of West Mercia Constabulary for his advice on developing a protocol of this kind.

- bestow some benefit to the respondent for answering the questions³

Don't:

- intimidate, coerce or threaten the respondent
- deceive the respondent
- set out to collect evidence for prosecution purposes
- seek out personal information about the respondent or his/her associates
- seek out information about specific crimes
- expect the researcher to allow actual taped interviews to be listened to by police or other government officials, unless it is revealed that a particular respondent is planning to commit an offence or admits to committing a serious crime for which they have not been prosecuted

Other *ERASOR* information includes using existing data collection methods such as Crime Stoppers, routine intelligence sources, and crime mapping. In addition, an Internet web site could be constructed so that Internet users who wish to report suspicious activity in stolen goods could use the new technology to share their information.

In sum, MRA project teams are encouraged to:

- study existing crime and disorder audits
- analyse intelligence logs and computerised intelligence systems
- interview known fence informants and their police handlers
- interview thief informants and their police handlers
- interview convicted local offenders (prison, young offender institutions, drug rehabilitation clinics)
- interview police officers about their local knowledge
- identify and analyse any other management information about theft, burglary, thieves and stolen goods dealers

³ This could be monetary payment, payment of a postal order into a prisoner's account, or gift certificate. Where the interviewee is a convicted prisoner, the researcher and the project team, and where appropriate the prison governor, should decide on the most appropriate form of compensation.

- contact Crime Stoppers to find out how many reports they are receiving on stolen goods, and on dealers and consumers of stolen goods. Look at how these reports are followed-up
- seek to identify any known links between stolen goods markets, drug markets and sex markets
- identify the whereabouts of local drug markets and identify dealers

The ERASOR concept evolved out of results from 45 earlier interviews with thieves and fences (Sutton 1998) and subsequent Home Office collection and analysis of data from 25 in-depth interviews with known prolific thieves operating in a policing area in the Southeast of England, where a total of 12 interviews were conducted at male young offender institutions, 7 at adult male prisons, 2 at a female prison and 4 with heroin users at a drug rehabilitation centre. All of the interviewees were given a guarantee that any information they provided would remain anonymous unless it included details about offences planned for the future, or those, which involved serious violence. Interviews typically took around 45 minutes to complete. All interviews were recorded on a tape recorder and then transcribed and analysed on a PC using NUD*IST⁴ software.

Due to the size of the sample, these interviews can only be indicative of the dynamics of local markets, therefore these findings may not be representative of local conditions or those elsewhere. Throughout the life of a MRA project, regular interviews should be conducted to increase the overall sample size with the aim to ensuring statistically reliable data. Crime in general, and stolen goods markets specifically, vary over time and location. Therefore, the MRA model proposes quarterly interviewing with offenders, prisoners, the public, shopkeepers, and police officers to reliably assess the nature of stolen goods markets within specific areas.

The findings from the 25 interviews are listed below:

How thieves think about stolen goods markets

offenders generally had no fear of being arrested when selling stolen goods

- thieves had little or no fear that an arrested fence would inform on them
- thieves selling stolen goods to strangers, or neighbours, had no fear that these people would 'inform' on them – strangers were generally described as workers on industrial estates, mini-cab drivers, builders and young motorists
- any change in the level of difficulty in selling stolen goods was rare, but when this happened it was due to changes in fashion – and was then reflected by a reduction in price

⁴ Software package designed for thematic analysis of qualitative data.

- thieves rarely knew of anyone who had been arrested for selling stolen goods

General modus operandi for thieves selling and transporting stolen goods

- many thieves had around 20 to 30 people and retail outlets where they feel they could 'safely' sell stolen goods
- a recently arrested residential fence usually started dealing again after just four weeks
- thieves usually managed to sell stolen goods within 24 hours of their theft
- thieves did not, generally, need to try hard or travel around to sell stolen goods, as they nearly always sold in their local area
- thieves, generally, did not use cars to transport goods and they felt confident walking openly along streets with stolen electrical goods
- drug-using shoplifters eventually became so well known locally that they had to travel to other towns and cities in order to steal
- those forced to travel to steal did so because they were too well known locally but they usually returned to their local area in order to sell
- shoplifters who used drugs and travelled by train often did not buy tickets

Specific modus operandi for stashing stolen goods

- despite occasionally losing their own, and finding the stashes of other thieves, thieves generally felt confident that their stashes of stolen goods were safe
- stolen goods were rarely dumped or given away
- back alleyways were used to stash all kinds of stolen goods
- back alleys were also used to transport stolen goods by burglars travelling on foot
- shoplifters and burglars generally stashed goods in 'safe' places in public and semi-public areas
- shoplifters generally only gathered up their 'booty' from where it had been stashed after they finished stealing for the day
- burglars usually returned to the stashed goods with their buyer

Buyers of stolen goods

- young offenders frequently sold stolen goods to taxi drivers and in taxi firm offices – where calls were often put out over the taxi company radio when particular goods became available
- ‘corner shop’ keepers regularly bought goods that were stolen from other shops and they also purchased stolen electrical goods from domestic burglaries
- residential fences and pawnbrokers were particularly prolific buyers of stolen goods

The role of the pub in the distribution of stolen goods

- nearly all pubs in the local area were deemed to be ‘safe’ places to sell stolen goods
- sales in pubs were nearly always to the publican or to bar staff – rarely to customers
- pubs were the best places to sell expensive alcoholic drinks stolen from supermarkets – and were often said to be for the publicans’ own private consumption, or for sale to friends and relatives

Looking at these findings, it is quite easy to see how an effective MRA project would be expected to evoke different responses from local thieves. For example, offenders should begin to find it harder to sell stolen goods, consequently travelling greater distances and spending more time trying to find buyers. This should, in turn, increase the perceived difficulty and risk of selling stolen goods in the local area, reduce general motivation to steal and lead to a fall in theft levels.

The role of shoplifting in the larger system of stolen goods markets

Offender interviews also revealed two very important issues concerning shoplifting:

- shoplifting provided entry for young offenders into fencing networks and other stolen goods markets
- some burglars, particularly those who frequently used illegal drugs, stole by shoplifting on a regular basis. Therefore, shoplifting helped to support offending careers whenever such offenders were not able or willing to commit more difficult types of theft such as burglary

Although police officers do routinely interview arrested thieves about their *modus operandi*, they do not routinely ask detailed questions about where the thieves sell stolen goods, or

where other thieves sell, or who is dealing in what type of goods at the local level. Paid police informants, as well as convicted prisoners, should, as a matter of routine, be asked about who is dealing in what particular types of stolen goods, where they are operating from and how active they are. The *ERASOR* process involves gathering this type of intelligence whenever the opportunity arises to get up-to-date information about stolen goods markets.

Learning about stolen goods markets with ERASOR

When information obtained from traditional crime data analysis is combined with that learned from *ERASOR*, the project team should soon know the following four things:

- the particular types of items that are most commonly stolen or sought after by thieves and fences
- the type of markets that are dealing in particular types of stolen goods
- where markets exist for particular types of stolen goods
- who is dealing in particular types of stolen goods, where they live, and the type of market they use

Once the project has been underway for a period of time, subsequent interviews with prolific thieves should begin to reveal:

- the impact that the MRA project is having on perceptions of the ease or difficulty of selling stolen goods in the local area
- the effect the MRA has on thieves' decisions about stealing and selling stolen goods
- an overall impression of how effective specific MRA tactics are at disrupting and/or reducing the stolen goods trade

Information gained as part of the *ERASOR* process is useful for informing decision making about the types of strategy and tactics that should be employed to reduce dealing in local stolen goods markets. Such information is particularly useful for monitoring a MRA project to identify any changes in the location, structure and organisation of markets. *ERASOR* information provides useful intelligence concerning market conditions at the start of a MRA project and continues to provide information about market changes and the impact that the MRA is having on local thieves and fences. The way that this information can be used to determine local MRA strategies and tactics is discussed throughout the following sections of this report.

4. Strategic planning for reducing stolen goods markets

This section explains the strategic planning component of the MRA as detailed in Figure 1. Strategic planning for crime reduction projects simply means the development of a long-term plan for success. A particularly important reason for having a strategic plan is to ensure that a project team agrees upon, adopts, and continues to use a **systematic approach** to both crime pattern analysis and the crime prevention planning process. The aim is also to empower the police to make authoritative and informed decisions, jointly as necessary with other agencies, regarding what crime problems to tackle, the most suitable types of crime reduction schemes to use, and where they should be implemented.

Police forces and other agencies should not expect to find a perfect “off-the-shelf” formula for their local crime problems. The secret to implementing successful crime reduction programmes lies in adhering to the correct planning process in order to develop carefully thought out strategies and tactics. Current thinking supports the view that local problems require local tailor-made solutions which are best arrived at **by working in partnership with other agencies** (see Sutton 1996 and Hough and Tilley 1998a). Crime and disorder partnerships provide an excellent infrastructure to develop MRA projects.

Strategic plans should be developed by a project team with membership drawn from various participating agencies such as the police, local authority, Trading Standards, retail sector, community groups, specialist research professionals and crime reduction consultants. The main aim of the plan is cost-effectively to reduce theft by tackling stolen goods markets in a systematic and routine way. A number of subsidiary aims will be determined by the results of local crime analysis. Under each of these subsidiary aims will be a series of objectives that need to be attained to achieve the main aim. Objectives are reached by successful implementation of various tactics that are discussed in Section 5 of this report. It is perhaps helpful at this stage to rehearse the old saying *that battles are won by tactics, while wars are won with strategy*.

Recommendations for interagency crime reduction strategic plans

Certain elements need to be included in strategic plans for any type of interagency crime-reduction project. Some are described by Tilley (1992):

- provision for the theoretical knowledge base of crime prevention/community safety to be used
- emphasise that it is a main objective to create longer term strategy

- ensure that training needs are identified and met
- ensure clearly identifiable terms of collaboration are agreed with other agencies and that there are signed and enforceable undertakings on both sides
- make money available to pump-prime interagency work
- educate the public about what reasonably to expect from the project
- avoid heightening fear
- avoid unreasonably raising expectations about success

Broader recommendations for police to use in MRA crime reduction projects:

General recommendations for a MRA project can be divided into three categories. While distinctions between these can, at times become blurred, the basic categories are *strategic*, *operational*, and *monitoring/evaluation*:

Strategic

- develop guidelines to enable project managers to identify and prioritise particular crimes to tackle, and also the individuals and targets most at risk of victimisation – and those most likely to benefit from action
- establish a project steering group consisting of representatives from local governments, businesses and professional researchers. The steering group must be monitored to ensure that it is not merely acting as a “rubber stamp” for the project managers decisions (Sutton 1996) and that it does not make arbitrary decisions based on intuition
- liaise with local justices and their clerks, judges and crown prosecutors to explain the aims of the project in terms of the anticipated increase in the number of defendants being charged with handling stolen goods
- always know the ‘mechanism’ (Pawson and Tilley 1997) by which a particular tactic should work to achieve the desired aim – ask: “in what way, exactly, will this work”
- after each ‘crackdown’, consolidate any successful crime reduction by implementing longer term tactics to address the underlying problems that led to the need for a crackdown in the first place
- avoid operations that aim to identify stolen goods for return to rightful owners - because research suggests that this is very resource intensive and is not at all cost effective in reducing acquisitive crime⁵

Operational

- seek to tackle those fences described by offenders as giving good or fair prices for stolen goods – because research suggests that these people are likely to encourage increased offending (Sutton 1998)
- use of Section 27 of the Theft Act of 1968 to discourage prolific thieves and handlers of stolen goods from continuing to engage in these activities⁶
- to help deter offenders, develop good public relations systems for the project – to ensure the provision of on-going news reports with local and national media coverage
- seek local authority co-operation to crack down on rogue traders – establish close lines of communication with trading standards officers
- consider very carefully the possible problems that can result from police ‘sting’ operations - such as bogus second-hand shops – because they are expensive, time consuming and research shows they may lead to an influx of crime into the area around the sting (see Langworthy and Lebau 1992; Sutton 1995; Felson 1998)

Monitoring/Evaluation

- before and after the implementation of particular tactics, always ask, “is this the most cost-effective way of disrupting this market?”
- find a balance between spending money quickly and perhaps carelessly, with the need to collect proper data and to justify targeting particular property, areas, victims, crimes and offenders
- appoint someone with responsibilities for continually monitoring various aspects of the implementation and, where possible, the impact of the project
- define success and those measures by which success is to be judged
- be sure to avoid falsely claiming successes if they did not arise from the project
- seek to limit the possibility of any displacement to other more vulnerable targets and places⁷

⁵ See Whitehead and Grey (1998).

⁶ Efforts are underway by West Mercia Constabulary to implement and evaluate the use of this tactic as part of their MRA initiative, “We Don’t Buy Crime”.

⁷ See Section 6 on types of crime displacement

Designing and implementing the strategic plan

It makes little sense to fire off numerous tactical options at any crime problem without due regard to suitability, timeliness, impact assessment and cost efficiency. Therefore, the MRA model, outlined in Figure 1, relies upon a systematic and routine framework to reach a set of clearly defined goals.

Policing by intuition should be avoided. There may be times, however, when common sense, opportunism or circumstances dictate that a certain tactical measure should be taken against stolen goods markets even though it is not part of the overall strategic framework. In such circumstances there should be a strong case for doing so and the tactic should be carefully monitored in terms of implementation issues, impact and cost effectiveness. Section 5 of this report suggests a number of possible MRA tactics.

As Figure 1 shows, the MRA model uses strategic planning to determine how to begin implementing tactics and then to continually develop the project as new and more detailed information is gathered and processed. A strategic plan should have three main strategic documents that will, together, provide a framework for tactical decision making:

- a general theft reduction strategy
- a monitoring and evaluation strategy
- an exit strategy

The documents that set out MRA strategies should be designed in consultation with, and be agreed by, the project team. A local, 'tailor-made' strategy will be at the core of any MRA project, and this should be approved by the project steering group. Steering groups should be comprised of various local governmental agencies, businesses, and professional researchers – so that a comprehensive crime reduction programme can be designed to meet the needs of the entire community. In addition to playing an advisory role, the group can bring valuable resources to the decision making and intervention processes. Members of the group should draw on the expertise of criminal justice officials, and other agencies such as Trading Standards, Customs and Excise, Benefits, Housing, the local retail community and any other relevant parties. At early meetings, project aims and objectives need to be developed and participants should enter into a discussion as to how they could contribute to meeting these aims, and what things could be done to make the group as productive as possible.

It is important to stress that the interagency approach must truly be an exchange relationship. No one agency can be seen as the "owner" of the project. Once the group agrees upon the direction of the project, a guiding document should be developed. The guiding document

should outline the goals, expectations and contribution that each agency can bring to the project. This eliminates ambiguity and clearly describes how the group should function. Of course, the document should be dynamic and able to change, as circumstances require. Research shows (Sutton 1996) that interagency approaches are at risk of failure when there is:

- ambiguity in what is expected of each participating member
- aims and objectives are non-existent or vague
- participation rate among members is low
- irregular meetings and attendance of members
- inconsistency in the way the initiatives are carried out
- one agency takes too much control over the group's functions

Steering groups usually meet weekly or monthly to decide important strategic issues and to ensure that the project is being implemented in accordance to the overall aims and objectives. Problems with tactics, strategy, and other decisions should be openly discussed and decisions made only after all members of the group are made aware of the situation.

The theft reduction strategy

Theft reduction strategies will need to take account of what is initially known about the dynamics of local stolen goods markets (see Section 3). From this, a local knowledge base will grow and evolve as the project progresses, particularly with information obtained through the *ERASOR* process. A list of locally effective strategic and tactical options will evolve accordingly. The general theft reduction strategy will be informed through *ERASOR* data generated by all members of the interagency group. For example, representatives from Trading Standards might have valuable information on commercial outlets that the police would not normally have. Again, the police would not always know if a local housing authority had received complaints about a residential fence operating out of their home. This sharing of information, intelligence, and data should be mutually beneficial to participating agencies. However, problems might arise if one agency is seen constantly to take information without ever giving in return.

The size, location and nature of local stolen goods markets will dictate the direction of a project team's activities. Therefore, it is not appropriate, at this point, to provide a full outline of what a MRA theft reduction strategy will contain because each strategy document must be

tailored to local conditions. Crime reduction measures are likely to work or fail according to their suitability to the particular crime and its setting (HMIC 1998). A MRA project should determine which type of stolen goods markets are most active and how to begin to tackle them. Exactly what is done to tackle markets will depend upon the level of resources that are available.

Deciding which problems to tackle

Some crimes are seen as more serious than others due to social circumstances and sometimes political considerations. It is not always the most prevalent theft in an area that receives most attention from those concerned with crime reduction. Decisions about which thefts to tackle can be influenced by public pressure and sometimes by pressure from the media. When the identification of a need for action does not arise from routine crime analysis, decisions about tackling certain theft problems are best taken by examining the degree of harm caused by all types of theft in the local area. An assessment should then be made about which type of theft should be tackled. To avoid implementing crime reduction by intuition, or on a whim, final decisions about the types of crime to be tackled should be decided by a project steering group. If a steering group decides to focus on reducing the number of repeat victims of burglary, the theft reduction strategy might involve finding out whether particular types of market are driving such repeat victimisation and then tackle them accordingly.

Bridgeman and Hobbs (1998) point out that repeat victimisations can take several forms. The same crime may not always be located in the same place against the same victim. A repeat victim could be a person, place or thing. Therefore, if thefts of certain things, such as digital car stereos, or laptop computers, are the problem then this might indicate the type of market that should be focused upon to prevent these goods from being stolen to order.

Pease (1998) found that more than half of all repetitions recorded in the 1992 British Crime Survey were probably committed by the same offender because these crimes consisted of the same thing being done, under the same circumstances. Therefore, MRA tactics chosen under a strategy to reduce repeat victimisation might aim to arrest prolific thieves. This could be done by seeking to make more arrests at points of sale, or by using tracking devices in goods that are most at risk of being stolen - or using smart water, genetic fingerprinting or invisible and permanent property marking in the homes of repeat burglary victims. It would then be worthwhile concentrating resources upon looking for evidence by targeting known prolific thieves to try to catch them transporting and storing goods that can be identified as stolen.

A theft reduction strategy can be set out like a business plan, with a fully worked out budget and a timeline showing when particular tactics are due to be implemented and why. The plan should be designed to be flexible, so that it can be altered to account for findings from project monitoring.

Monitoring the MRA strategy

Monitoring is an important, and often ignored, component of crime reduction strategies. Monitoring has two main functions. The first is to guide the implementation of the project, and is crucial in helping the project team determine the suitability of different strategies and tactics. The second is to ensure that essential facts are recorded and data collected for a final evaluation to see if the project had a cost-effective and significant effect on theft. This monitoring process also aims to determine why particular tactics succeed and others fail.

The level of MRA activity and its tactical contribution should be monitored throughout the life of the project, because one of the aims of monitoring is to ensure that the project makes a unique contribution to reducing crime. In order to do so, it will be necessary to monitor whether there is any input and effect from other types of crime reduction activity going on in the local area.

The type of crime data described earlier, in Section 3, can be used as a baseline against which to measure the precise contribution a project makes to crime reduction in the local area. As previously mentioned, gathering baseline data for a minimum of three years prior to the start of the project would be of great benefit. This will provide a more reliable picture of previous crime trends – including typical seasonal variations. These longer-term crime trends will reveal short-term peaks or dips in crime that may have occurred in the past. Fluctuations such as these can then be accounted for when calculating the project's impact on local, and item-specific, theft levels. They will also help to plan the timing of particular tactics to reduce seasonal crime problems such as, for example, thefts in December of commercially grown Christmas trees, shoplifting, theft of Christmas presents, or summer thefts from tourists cars in city centre car parks.

The implementation of all tactics, and the impact they have, must be monitored carefully and on a routine basis. If monitoring reveals that particular tactics are successful, then those tactics should remain in the strategic frame – unless no longer necessary because the type of product stolen is no longer “hot” or has ceased to be obtainable.

Those MRA tactics that are clearly not working – or do not appear to be particularly cost-effective – should be modified or removed from the project. Decisions to remove or alter a tactical option should be made by the project team as a whole. This is to ensure that the overall aims and objectives are being met as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. Monitoring is discussed further in Section 6, to outline how it should be used to help to guide a project to success.

When designing a monitoring strategy, it is important not to fall into the trap of only implementing the type of tactics that can be monitored easily. This potential problem was highlighted in the Morgan Report (Morgan 1991). The problem and the broad approach to dealing with it are worth noting:

If monitoring is to be promoted as a systematic, regular activity in the crime prevention process, there is a risk that it will encourage community safety activities which are easily monitored rather than those which are relevant to the longer term social needs of the neighbourhood, which may not be susceptible to simple evaluation. There is also the danger of setting misleading objectives through looking at intermediate rather than final outcomes. For example, an intermediate objective might be to increase the number of neighbourhood watch schemes whereas the desired final outcome would be to reduce crime. However, these problems must be sensibly managed rather than deny the need for monitoring and evaluation.

Monitoring should be undertaken to ensure that the project is doing what it is meant to be doing. Measures should include:

- arrest levels of all thieves, especially prolific thieves
- successful prosecution of all thieves, especially prolific thieves
- arrest levels of dealers and consumers
- successful prosecution of dealers and consumers
- ratio of primary to secondary arrests for thieves and handlers
- number of reports to special project hotlines and others such as Crime Stoppers
- theft levels of certain (expensive) items such as jewellery and electrical goods
- overall value of property stolen
- levels of stolen property recovered by police – a significant increase will provide an indication of the extent to which the market for stolen goods has shrunk
- levels of stolen goods found to have been dumped by offenders⁸
- theft rate at the local area level and neighbouring areas – relative to broadly comparable areas elsewhere
- degree to which specific types of theft are targeted in MRA tactics

⁸ This would indicate that thieves were having a difficult time disposing stolen goods.

Having an exit strategy

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC 1998) found that with all types of crime reduction work:

A danger is that commitment may be short-lived unless systems and structures are in place to ensure that it continues beyond the tenure of one person. Leadership at all levels is dependent upon individuals and there was evidence of fragility in that and enthusiasm ceased when that person moved on. National organisations criticised the police for lack of continuity and consistency, feeling that they were negotiating with an individual, not a force.

One way to address this problem is to ensure that the creativity and unique contribution offered by individual members of the project team is properly assessed and recorded. If evaluation finds that the project is successful, then the unique qualities that contributed to this success can be incorporated into crime reduction work in the future. For this to be able to happen, results of project evaluations need to be published, disseminated and referenced with the names, occupations and specific qualities of the key people who made it work. Similarly, if a project fails, it is important that the failure is recorded and explained to prevent 'cloning another lame-duck' at a future date.

5. Tactical planning, cracking down and marketing the MRA

Once the steering group and project team have developed the overall strategic plan, operational tactical planning can begin. Again, it must be stressed that data must drive the tactics. To do otherwise is likely to reduce cost-efficiency and possibly even to set the project up for failure. In addition to examining these areas, this section also deals with some possible MRA tactics, and explains the importance of marketing the MRA to thieves, stolen goods dealers and the general public.

MRA tactics

Tactics can be described as the shorter-term initiatives that are implemented in pursuit of achieving the main and long-term strategic goal. For the MRA, this goal is to achieve a significant and cost-effective reduction in theft.

The five main markets for stolen goods identified in the Home Office Handling Study (Sutton 1998) provide a useful framework to begin to devise possible tactics to tackle local stolen goods markets. However, the different lists of tactics contained in this section of the report are by no means definitive. They are merely intended to suggest the kind of things that can be done with the MRA. Project steering groups should adopt, adapt, and advise suitable tactics that will work in their own area. Encouraging team members to suggest new ideas for possible tactical deployment is in keeping with the POP tradition and will improve any project's evolutionary cycle of improvement.

Commercial Fence Supplies and Commercial Sales Markets

Investigative and preventive efforts in Commercial Fence Supplies Markets should focus on thieves and fences – because there are no 'innocent' consumers. In Commercial Sales Markets the customers are likely to be 'innocent consumers' so the focus for crime prevention should be upon the 'dealer'. Attention should be focused upon 'crime facilitators', such as business people who buy stolen goods, so that they and the thieves who supply them will need to invest more effort and face greater risks if they want to convert stolen property into cash. This could be achieved through adopting the following measures:

- use existing intelligence and *ERASOR* information to identify which shops and businesses thieves visit in order to sell stolen goods
- monitor the thieves entering these shops through surveillance in order to gain evidence for prosecuting both the thief and the fence

- implement local legislation so that shopkeepers and other types of business people who purchase second-hand goods are required to demand proof of identity and then enter the names and addresses of sellers in a record book alongside a detailed description of the goods
- use test-selling to see if businesses are complying with local legislation
- promote stricter requirements for proof of ownership
- encourage shops that buy and sell second hand goods to display signs stating that they are part of a crime prevention programme to reduce theft and handling
- use of innovative, state-of-the-art property marking methods such as “invisible” micro-dot systems on property that is particularly “at-risk” of theft
- ‘scrutinise then utilise’ interagency support to crackdown on any irregularities committed by businesses known to deal in stolen goods
- pay particular attention to taxi cab drivers. Preliminary research shows that they may frequently be used by thieves to take them to and from burglary sites – sometimes even as accomplices – and to find buyers for stolen goods (Sutton 1998)

Residential Fence Supplies

These markets could be reduced through identifying and arresting residential fences. Some residential fences also deal in drugs, which is not surprising since research shows that theft is a common way to fund drug abuse. Therefore, it might be worth combining efforts to reduce local illicit drug markets with schemes aimed at reducing stolen goods markets. Such an approach would tackle the main causes of serious theft:

- use existing and ERASOR information to find out who the fences are, who they deal with and how they operate
- use interagency networks, such as housing associations and local authority housing/licensing departments, to seek evictions of those trading stolen goods from residential addresses
- ask recent burglary victims, living in high crime neighbourhoods, if they know of anyone locally who might be trading in drugs or stolen goods – such questions could be asked by scenes of crimes officers or by way of a telephone survey

- to reduce demand for cut price second-hand electrical goods on high crime estates, consider recycling stolen goods (that have been recovered but remain unclaimed) to uninsured burglary victims and other potential customers of residential and commercial fences⁹

Network Sales

To impact on this type of stolen goods market, police could:

- arrest residential fences
- implement local 'rule setting' (see Clarke 1997) schemes to remove any ambiguity in what is and is not acceptable behaviour
- reduce illegal trading subcultures in the areas where they currently thrive – by using publicity campaigns which discourage people from buying stolen goods and encourage the reporting of persons who do to the police or Crime Stoppers hotlines.

Hawking Markets

Consumers may be 'innocent' when they buy in Commercial Supplies markets, but they are not so 'innocent' when they buy goods cheaply in pubs or at their doorstep. In these markets, surveillance measures might work well alongside tactics aimed at increasing awareness of the consequences of buying stolen goods. Some suggestions for tactics include:

- analyse *ERASOR* information and existing criminal intelligence information to identify the housing estates and pubs where hawkers frequently sell stolen goods
- monitor closely, either on the streets or in pubs, hawkers who usually carry holdalls to transport stolen goods such as meat, cigarettes or clothes
- arrest hawkers and their customers
- use on-going media campaigns, in conjunction with tactical operations, to highlight the number of people arrested and convicted – in order to reduce the demand among the buying public
- use poster campaigns to highlight how parasitical theft cycles work (Sutton 1998)
- set up special telephone hotlines, or work with Crime Stoppers to invite the public to inform on pubs and clubs where hawking is taking place

⁹ This is discussed further in Section 8 as a means of consolidating after cracking down.

General MRA tactics – deterrence and incapacitation

- arrange to have ‘arrest days’ for dealers of stolen goods, and take the press along for media coverage
- with due regards to human rights legislation, implement a long-term campaign to “name and shame” dealers and consumers of stolen goods
- use one local court to promote consistency in sentencing dealers and consumers¹⁰
- use Section 27 of the Theft Act of 1968 to discourage prolific thieves and handlers from dealing in stolen goods
- police officers work with transport (railways) police at stations and other routes where ERASOR research suggests thieves are transporting stolen goods
- private security patrols and neighbourhood watch organisations should be alerted to the places where ERASOR reveals thieves are stashing stolen goods – and stashed goods could be watched to secure evidence or simply seized with an aim to make stealing less profitable
- neighbourhood watch organisations should alert the police whenever they see people carrying electrical goods around “problem” housing areas or to and from taxi cabs
- research shows that most domestic burglars call at the front door first to ensure that a property is empty – a special hotline could be set up, in targeted areas for limited periods, for members of the public to alert the police whenever someone calls at their door claiming to be looking for somebody else (see Sutton 1998)
- increase recruitment and the use of police informants

Tackling different markets simultaneously should send a clear message to thieves, fences and other handlers that their activities are becoming more hazardous and perhaps, for many, no longer worth the risk. Targeting markets in this way would also make it difficult for offenders to change their method of offending. Otherwise, they might simply choose different markets and targets (e.g. stealing or dealing in cash and credit cards rather than goods). To create a broad deterrent effect, projects should have an on-going media campaign to highlight the number of people arrested and convicted since the MRA project was launched. For moral exhortation, a media campaign should emphasise the negative, long-term consequences that are passed on to the public as a result of the stolen goods trade.

¹⁰ See Whitehead and Gray (1998).

Marketing the MRA and increasing the deterrent effect on stolen goods markets

As Figure 1 shows, the MRA uses marketing techniques¹¹ to inform offenders and to make the wider public aware that the project aims to increase the risks involved in selling and buying stolen goods. This crime deterrent method could be termed 'risk projection' because it is intended that offenders will reduce or cease particular types of offending in light of their increased perception of the risk of being caught and prosecuted (see Kennedy 1997).

Kennedy (1997) implemented a particularly creative programme in Boston, Massachusetts in the USA to reduce the number of killings among teenage gang members. In very simple terms, Kennedy's project involved an interagency effort, including the police and prosecutors. The project team warned gang members that there was going to be a co-ordinated crackdown on anyone found carrying a firearm or ammunition. Gang members were warned that they faced an increased risk of arrest and if convicted they would receive a harsh sentence. When a young man received a sentence of 13 years imprisonment for carrying live bullets, his photograph and details of his crime and sentence were widely advertised on billboards. The number of shootings dropped dramatically. In short, the Boston Gun Project warned gang members in advance that they were facing increased risks of capture and prosecution – so that they could weigh the risks and consider how to behave. The project showed gang members that the warnings had been real and that the agencies and local community were serious about reducing crimes of violence. Gang members altered their behaviour accordingly.

For sometime, writers have distinguished between "knowing" and "innocent" purchases of stolen goods (see Colquhoun 1796; Hall 1952; Henry 1978; and Sutton 1995). Picking up on this, Clarke (1997) explains how situational crime prevention can be used to "remove excuses" for crime using "rule setting" techniques and those "stimulating conscience." Rather than impacting upon thieves and professional fences, this is likely to be effective against the wider public who either "know," "suspect" or have not considered the provenance of goods purchased in informal ways. In stolen goods markets, rule setting tactics could include buying and selling second-hand goods in pubs, the workplace and other locations. To stimulate conscience among the wider public, situational crime prevention tactics can include signs and posters that explain how buying stolen goods forms part of a parasitical theft cycle (see Sutton 1995; 1998).

Marketing techniques that are aimed at either stimulating conscience, or risk projection, can be employed in a MRA programme. For example, West Mercia Constabulary's MRA project, "We Don't Buy Crime" (funded by the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme) includes a tactic that notifies offenders of an intention to use Section 27 of the Theft Act of 1968. This section of the Theft Act allows for joint prosecution of those suspected of stealing and/or handling stolen goods. More importantly, however, is the provision that streamlines the process of proving criminal intent of theft or handling for those who have been convicted of theft or

¹¹ See Section 5 of this report.

handling within a five-year period prior to a current charge and who has had within their possession stolen goods from a theft occurring no more than 12 months prior to the current charge. Under Section 27 it is possible, for the purpose of proving that a person knew or believed goods to be stolen, to present evidence of earlier convictions for theft or handling stolen goods.

The systematic and routine implementation of the Section 27 tactic can be evaluated for its effectiveness in reducing the stolen goods markets. West Mercia Constabulary aims to collect base-line data on prosecutions and convictions for theft and handling prior to marketing their use of the Section 27 tactic. Once offenders and the wider public are officially informed that the tactic is being vigorously used, and its use becomes routine, similar data will be collected to measure its effectiveness in reducing local stolen goods markets.

Marketing might also be used to raise the profile of a project once it has achieved measurable success. Officials should resist the temptation to concentrate on marketing until there is something that can be used to show that it has actually been successful in prosecuting thieves and handlers and in reducing local theft levels. This can be done through local newspapers, radio and television, with an aim to increase the deterrent effect that the project is having. It would be helpful to have a representative of the local press or a police press officer on the project team to help develop the project's media and marketing strategy.

A MRA project is likely to benefit from having an identifiable name that is clearly associated with the project aims. Once a project has scored some successes, thieves, dealers and consumers should be made aware that the crackdown and consolidation was due to the named project. Then continual reminders of the project's name, and its presence should be posted so that it may weigh heavily against decisions to continue offending. Typical methods employed in this type of marketing include printing project logos on beer mats, poster campaigns, signs, letterheads, web sites, and regular news coverage.

As it is a relatively new concept, a local strategy should be devised to market the MRA concept within participating agencies¹². The aim here is to win the enthusiasm of employees, particularly those who will have to explain the MRA to other agencies and members of the public, or those faced with the laborious task of gathering data for the project.

¹² Section 5 of this report provides a number of recommendations for marketing MRA projects.

6. Monitoring, reviewing and evaluating the MRA

The terms monitoring and evaluation are often used interchangeably, which can lead to confusion. The importance of monitoring has been emphasised throughout this report, while little has been mentioned of the role of evaluation. This section describes monitoring in further detail, distinguishes between the two terms and deals with some important evaluation issues.

Monitoring is much cheaper to do than a full cost-benefit programme/project evaluation (see Dhiri and Brand 1999). Monitoring essentially involves 'keeping a finger on the pulse' of the project with an aim to keep it as cost effective as possible. In addition, monitoring will help decision-makers stay true to the concept. An evaluation, however, is often independently conducted and will use information provided from the monitoring process to look at how the project was implemented, what effect the project had on reducing crime and why it had that effect, or indeed why it failed to have an effect. Descriptions of the types of evaluation that can be conducted, and the arguments for selecting which type is best, have been well researched elsewhere (see, for example, Pawson and Tilley 1997) and these are discussed in more detail below.

A MRA project will generate information about dealers and consumers of stolen goods. Such information will come from arrests on the streets, phone calls to the police and other agencies, from police informants, questioning suspects, neighbourhood watch, victims of crime, CCTV and police observational operations. It is important to monitor the source of information to determine whether particular channels of communication are operating effectively. Monitoring the action that each piece of information generates, will produce data that can be analysed to measure any success that can be attributed to particular elements of the project. These measures of success will include the number of successful prosecutions and fencing outlets closed down.

Monitoring mechanisms

One way to seek to identify the mechanism by which a MRA project affects crime is to interview a sample of recently convicted thieves, who were operating in the local area prior to their sentence. In-depth interviews should be carried out with well known prolific thieves and also with less experienced offenders before the project is implemented, and then at regular intervals throughout the life of the project. By asking general questions about how easy it is to operate as a thief in the local area, the aim here is to see what impact the project is having on thieves and why. Among other things, convicted thieves can be asked about:

- how frequently they offend
- how safe/easy it is to transport stolen goods
- how safe/easy it is to stash stolen goods
- how easy it is to sell stolen goods
- perception of general risk involved in obtaining money/drugs by stealing
- techniques for evading arrest
- techniques for finding buyers

Good monitoring practice

The Morgan Report (1991) found that evaluation and monitoring were the weakest elements of most crime prevention programmes. To improve on this, the report makes the following recommendations:

Local multi-agency partnerships should set clearly defined objectives at the start of any activity, measuring the achievements of these at the start and finish of the activity and reporting on how far they have been met. These measures must however be qualitative as well as quantitative, with many of the assessments based on community consultation.

The message provided here, and earlier in Section 4, is that monitoring should not be seen as optional. Monitoring the implementation process is particularly important because failure to implement a project as planned is a common cause of project failure (HMIC 1998).

Most importantly, monitoring can reveal implementation problems and inform decisions about making adjustments:

- when people are not carrying out their responsibilities
- where there is a weaknesses in the implementation

Monitoring and displacement issues

One of the criticisms of situational crime reduction approaches, such as the MRA, is that crime is displaced elsewhere (Clarke 1997). Offenders may change their methods of offending, choosing different targets (e.g. stealing cash or credit cards rather than goods), or new offenders may emerge who are not deterred (Bennett and Wright 1984; Barr and Pease

1990; Wright and Decker 1994). Opponents of situational crime prevention methods argue that displacement can occur in several ways once the intervention is activated.

Displacement takes five main forms (Repetto 1976):

- i) the offender continues to commit the same type of offences, in the same locations, targeting the same victims, but at a different **time**;
- ii) the offender continues to commit the same type of offences, at the same location, at the same time targeting the same people, but utilising different **techniques**;
- iii) the offender simply switches the **target** of victimisation;
- iv) the offender maintains the same pattern of offending, but simply moves to a new **location**; or
- v) the offender begins committing a different type of **offence**.

If monitoring suggests that displacement is a problem then, as outlined in Section 4, MRA projects may seek to limit displacement by seeking to co-ordinate the timing of each crackdown on each of the different market types and their locations. Depending upon resources and local conditions, all 5 market types in the local area may be tackled simultaneously, or as a series of crackdowns and consolidations (Wright and Pease 1995), or sequentially.

The issue of displacement is now seen by some writers to be less of a problem than it was originally thought to be. Research conducted by Hesseling (1994) suggests that displacement is never total and that there always seems to be a net gain in crime reduction terms. Pease (1998) describes this process as a 'diffusion of benefits', where:

...often the opposite to displacement occurs, where crime reductions extend beyond the boundaries of the project area.

Nonetheless, monitoring should be done to keep a check on all types of displacement that might occur and to look out for other adverse consequences that might arise from tackling stolen goods markets. It is particularly important to ask:

- Are there unforeseen police/agency abstractions from other equally important duties?
- Is there an increase in other types of serious crime?

- Is there an increase in theft in other areas?
- Is there an emergence of new and more efficient markets?
- Does the reduction of one market type help another grow?
- Does the reduction of a particular market type in one place lead to the emergence of the same market type in another place?

An additional potential problem that might stem from cracking down on stolen goods markets is that repeat victimisation might increase. This might happen if offenders seek to redress the imbalance of certainty in their offending. Where in the past they felt secure in selling stolen goods, they might seek to compensate by being even more secure in stealing. They may, therefore, more frequently target places where they believe there is less chance of being caught. Namely, those where they have got away with theft before.

Thinking about possible pitfalls

One MRA tactic is to seek to encourage the public to report those who handle stolen goods. Therefore, if this tactic produces a large increase in recorded crime, there may be an initial decrease in the police clear up rate of recorded offences. The *ERASOR* process is also likely to reveal many more handling offences than can be cleared up. Focusing on shoplifting will also affect the clear up rate. This is because recorded shoplifting offences are most usually those where the offender has been caught by a store detective. A campaign to focus on reducing shoplifting, as a means to reduce burglary, car crime and overall entry into criminal careers, might actually increase the number of recorded shoplifting offences. This would happen where good project monitoring begins to collect data on instances of shoplifting that would not have previously been reported – e.g.: where thieves manage to slip away. These types of data can be obtained with the co-operation of major retail outlets and consortiums. There should be an explicit aim in the MRA strategy to increase reporting and to use the resulting intelligence to reduce crime.

Foresight is required to head-off potential problems and unfair criticisms regarding clear-up rates. Allowances may need to be made, at all levels of management and review of local crime figures. Project teams should anticipate problems and propose solutions to them in their strategic plan. The aim should be to prevent projects from becoming victims of their own success by enabling them to use valuable tactics, including the collection of data, that might in the short-term reflect badly on national crime reduction criteria.

Choosing evaluation types

A simple evaluation is tantamount to monitoring (HMIC 1998). However, the term evaluation can also be used to describe so called quasi-experimental designs – which analyse “before” and “after” measures of crime in project areas and compare the results with carefully matched areas elsewhere. These are referred to as control groups or control areas. This type of evaluation can be very expensive due to the costs involved in collecting and analysing a lot of complex crime and control area data. Additionally, an evaluation of quasi-experimental designs may prove impractical in social settings.

Expensive impact evaluations are certainly not necessary where a particular crime reduction approach has already been proved successful (see HMIC 1998). Even innovative and untested methods do not necessarily require a highly expensive impact evaluation if they are confined to a small area and the crime data from these areas is already subject to routine analysis by in-house staff. With smaller scale projects, expensive evaluations cannot be justified because they would probably cost more than the project itself. Providing a project is carefully monitored, less expensive evaluations will suffice for smaller projects.

Another factor to consider, when deciding what type of evaluation can be justified, is that the research community appears now to be fairly evenly divided about whether quasi experimental types of evaluation should be conducted at all. Pawson and Tilley's (1997) ‘realistic mechanistic approach’ to evaluation should be considered at all times. Many experts now argue that Pawson and Tilley's approach can provide findings that are likely to be of greater value than those obtained from the majority of quasi-experimental evaluations. This is because the ‘realistic’ approach concentrates far more on the precise way, or ‘mechanism’, by which a project influences change. Pawson and Tilley point out that the quasi experimental design works well for natural science experiments conducted in the scientific laboratory, where the subject and the control might be identical, but are not always suitable in social settings – where complex and unique human environments are used as experimental and control areas. The truth is that places can never even come close to being identical. There will always be unknown and unmeasured things going on in places where people live and work. Realistic evaluation promotes the need to understand what works why and in what circumstances (Tilley 2000).

Reviewing and evolving

There is less to be gained by looking at what worked and why *after* a crime reduction initiative has finished, because it is then too late to improve the project. That said, post-project evaluation can be beneficial for general knowledge and perhaps for the development of future projects. As with all projects using the problem-oriented process, it is essential continually to monitor, review and invoke necessary changes while the project is still happening. The aim is to evolve and improve through adapting what has been known to work elsewhere, repeating successful tactics, changing or dropping those that do not work and developing innovative solutions where necessary.

7. Consolidating after the MRA crackdowns

Police crackdowns involve concentrating resources, for a limited period, upon a particular crime problem. This usually involves arresting offenders to reduce crime through incapacitation and deterrence. Sherman (1990) found that, after the crackdown, crime rates might stay down for a while but only for a limited period. From this cause, Wright and Pease (1995) advocate the use of a crackdown and consolidation cycle as a possible means to overcome the problem of rapid decay of the crackdown effect. The crackdown and consolidation cycle works by following up crackdowns with a monitoring process to determine when crime problems rise sufficiently to warrant a further crackdown, and all the while seeking to consolidate upon the success of each crackdown by addressing the underlying causes of the crime problem.

Consolidation addresses the underlying weaknesses, problems and situations that provide an environment where crime reaches problem levels. Consolidation should seek to reduce the capacity, or will, for offenders to offend while they are in the community. Consolidation should also seek to dissuade new offenders from emerging when experienced offenders grow out of crime or are in custody.

Interviews with thieves and consumers of stolen goods (Sutton 1998) have revealed that merely cracking down on stolen goods markets is unlikely to be as effective as might be hoped. This is because society places a high value on the possession of desirable consumer goods – but people living in high crime areas cannot afford them at high street prices. A consolidation strategy might, therefore, seek to introduce alternative means for people to buy cut price goods – the aim would be to dissuade existing or potential dealers from merely stepping in to fill the shoes of those arrested in earlier crackdowns.

General consolidation tactics

If consolidation tactics are ‘badged’ with a MRA project name – for example “We Don’t Buy Crime” – then this association with the MRA may help to both raise and maintain awareness about the problems caused by stolen goods markets. Maintaining the MRA message at community ‘grass roots level’ will require energy and commitment. If the aim is to make the MRA a routine part of a local community safety strategy, then Project Managers may need to develop innovative tactics to tackle the root causes of stolen goods markets as well as cracking down on the markets themselves. This action will, in itself, maintain the message as well as seek to tackle the factors that cause stolen goods markets to emerge and flourish.

In the first instance, it might be worth trying out some of the following consolidation tactics in areas where stolen goods markets thrive. It must be emphasised, however, that these tactics are most likely to be relatively long-term in their impact. For example:

- establish community-based credit unions – so that people can save for legitimate goods
- negotiate for community access to wholesale/discount warehouses to buy the type of produce/commodities that are sold in hawking markets in order to reduce the consumer based upon which hawkers rely
- encourage recycling of legitimate second hand goods that might otherwise be thrown away or stored
- recycle recovered, but unclaimed, stolen goods retrieved from crackdown operations
- recycle recovered goods that are unwanted by the insurance industry or by other police forces
- replace stolen goods markets with legitimate alternatives by replicating the structure of the markets and utilising private sector funding to sell legitimate goods at lower prices than the going-rate for stolen goods

Consolidation through reducing shoplifting

Our interviews with prolific thieves suggests that shoplifting often provides a route into criminal careers, and leads to trading in stolen goods markets – which then encourages further offending. Since shoplifting is also frequently used as a “fall-back crime” by some burglars and car thieves, consolidation tactics might include working with the retail sector to reduce shoplifting.

Tackling shoplifting could also play a major part in identifying problem drug users and eventually getting them involved in schemes to help reduce their drug use and offending. Drug users who steal to buy drugs frequently help to create new markets for stolen goods by offering goods to new drug dealers in direct exchange for drugs (see Sutton 1998). Therefore, another MRA consolidation strategy might involve working closely with, and developing the capacity of, local agencies to deal with the type of problem drug users and dealers who are responsible for a disproportionate amount of all acquisitive crime.

The way forward

The next phase in the development of the MRA involves the creation of strategy and tactics to exploit a sustainable competitive advantage over illegal markets, with subsidised legitimate

competition. Interagency partnerships might seek to utilise marketing expertise from the business community to research illegal markets and employ innovative “anti-marketing” tactics against them. In effect, this would involve looking at what marketing experts would do to improve, or sustain, a business and then seeking to do the opposite to undermine those who make money from dealing in stolen goods.

Legal markets could be subsidised and they could employ unfair trading practices, such as trading at a loss, to compete with stolen goods dealers. To provide one example, introducing cheaper and legitimate competition could reduce illegal car parts markets. It is strange-but-true that perfectly good cars are very often worth less than the sum of the value of their component parts. Even if a new car were to be dismantled for the parts market, this can easily amount to as much as 2½ times more (at official parts dealer prices) than the whole car would cost in a showroom (Robbins 1999). This means that the second-hand car parts business can be very lucrative. However, stringent environmental regulations, and planning laws, have made it extremely expensive for anyone to start-up a business that involves stripping parts from crash damaged, old and otherwise non-roadworthy cars. It could be argued that it is easier to run a car stripping business, taking parts from stolen cars, than it is to run one legally.

To consolidate after crackdowns on illegal car stripping ‘enterprises’, it might be worth seeking funding to buy or rent a place where cars can be stripped under supervision. The aim here is to compete for customers of illegal enterprises and so drive them out of business. Scrap cars could be monitored to ensure that they are not stolen. Such an enterprise would be extremely expensive and it is likely that multiple funding would be required. This suggestion is really quite revolutionary for a crime reduction tactic. However, if it is successful in driving the illegal motor trade out of business the benefits will be large. It would be advisable to first conduct a feasibility study in the local area. An expensive tactic of this kind would also require an evaluation to determine cost effectiveness in reducing car crime. If feasible, such an enterprise might be jointly managed by the probation service – who tend to have considerable experience of running motor project schemes for young offenders – and industrial salvage experts. Since car theft affects the insurance industry, this might be one possible source to approach for primary funding and donor vehicles.

Conclusion

Stolen goods markets influence decisions about whether or not to steal because they enable thieves to convert stolen property into cash. The MRA seeks to weaken motivation to steal while reducing the vulnerability of ‘hot products’. It is designed to reduce theft by hampering the ability of thieves to cultivate new markets, while continuously attempting to disrupt existing illegal trading.

The MRA offers considerable scope for consolidating after market crackdowns with a range of tactics aimed at reducing the customer base of illegal markets. This can be done by implementing “anti-marketing” tactics and also by introducing legitimate subsidised competition. If MRA tactics are successful, they should help to reduce motivation to steal or, at the very least, slow thieves down to reduce theft levels.

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