



# Targeting burglary

ACT Policing's *Operation Halite* is taking a strategic and systematic approach to crime targeting, equipping it with the tools required to successfully reduce volume crime in the nation's capital.

The operation, originally formed to address concerns about increasing burglary rates in the ACT in 2002, has proven successful in its approach to recidivist offenders with an intelligence-led strategy and a whole-of-government response to public safety issues. This strategy sees team members target offenders in place of the traditional focus on locations; it's about people, not bricks and mortar.

One of the key elements to the operation's ongoing successes has been its ability to analyse and explore better ways of working. This has included improve effectiveness by combining three key units – investigations, intelligence and crime prevention – into one group. The new format was launched in September 2004 and now holds arguably one of the most innovative volume crime fighting strategies in Australia.

The strategy is centred on two key facts the first of which is that less than one per cent of the population commits more than 90 per cent of the crime. The second is that volume crime makes up around 80 per cent of crime in the ACT.

The operation attacks these elements in innovative ways, from intelligence gathering to high-profile targeted campaigns and information sharing with other government agencies.

Consistent with *Operation Halite's* intelligence-led approach to investigations, the team has conducted a series of planned campaigns in the ACT.

Most recently, members conducted a high-profile saturation campaign in Canberra's inner south which led to multiple arrests and was hailed a success by Detective Sergeant Mick Calatzis.

"We knew there were persons of interest in the area, and we knew that could make local residents vulnerable," he said. "The feedback we've had from locals after today's operation confirms that our presence was welcomed by residents, and helped make this community a better place."

The campaign provided an opportunity for police to target known persons of interest in the area, while also making contact with local residents to address any concerns with the dual benefit of providing police with intelligence from locals, while also helping make the community safer.

Previous campaigns have proven successful both in the short term – with the arrest of recidivist property offenders – and in the long term, with statistics showing calls for help from targeted areas have reduced by as much as 30 per cent after Halite operations.

Complementing this is post-operational intelligence which suggests criminal activities had not reached the proportion of crime existing prior to operations. This is aided by uniformed Crime Prevention team members who are used in the period after such operations, in highly visible reinforcement measures.

“The strong and highly visible police presence helped make local residents feel safer in their own homes,” Detective Sergeant Calatzis said. “And we’ll do it again.”

“We’ve seen from past operations the impact we have on local communities. It’s operations such as this latest one which really show the difference we can make.

“Current intelligence held by police and solid information received from the public showed property offenders and persons wanted on warrants were residing or frequenting this area, which could make tenants in the area vulnerable to crime.

“We addressed this by undertaking the operation and by working with other agencies such as ACT Housing, Urban Services, ACT Corrective Services and AFP Protective Service.”

ACT Policing’s saturation operations complement existing warrant, proactive targeting and Crime Prevention strategies conducted on a regular basis.

The planning for these campaigns is extensive, beginning with the ongoing analysis of police intelligence to look for patterns in the habits of known property offenders, illicit drug users and people wanted on warrants. When patterns emerge about the places these people reside or frequent, saturation campaigns are conducted to disrupt their unlawful activities.

This public safety and crime reduction strategy has led to a marked decline in crime across the Territory over the past 12 months.

## Background

*Operation Halite* commenced in October 2002 as a regional operation to help meet the goals of the ACT Policing Agreement with the ACT Government to facilitate the effective provision of policing services in Canberra.

At times, ACT Policing has a requirement to develop a major or long-term operation to strategically address a particular type of offence. *Operation Halite* is directed at people committing property and related drug supply offences in the ACT.

The decision to commence the operation was driven by statistics which showed burglaries in the Territory were increasing at a rate higher than that of the national average. During 2000, burglary and stolen motor vehicle offences within Australia



rose at the highest rate recorded among industrialised nations – including Canada, England, Wales and the United States.

Prior to the operation, ACT Policing had responded to this trend by conducting a number of short-term operations, the success of which could be measured in two main ways: the degree to which policing results in an overall reduction in the burglary rate and the length of time an operation had managed to keep burglary rates lower than average.

The operations were all found to have immediate and significant effects on the burglary rate. However, studies found that despite the positive immediate effects of the short-term operations, there was minimal long-term sustainability of reduced criminality, and burglary rates began to increase from the conclusion of operations.

This trend was highlighted in the Australian Institute of Criminology report *Policing Urban Burglary*, which found “these operations have been effective in achieving a short-term reduction in burglary rates, but the

number of burglaries has risen again after the cessation of the operation (though not to pre-operation rates). The latest strategy – *Operation Anchorage* (which ran from February 2001 until the end of June 2001) – included special burglary-reduction teams, surveillance, police stops and random breath tests in high burglary areas. Following *Operation Anchorage*, the number of burglaries in Canberra declined from 169 per week to 92 per week.”<sup>1</sup>

However, one of the most important achievements of the earlier operations was establishing a precedent regarding the effectiveness and requirement for this type of focused operation, but on a long-term basis.

## Success of the Partnership Crime Group

*Operation Halite* established, and now leads, the Partnership Crime Group (PCG) along with government, community and business groups.

The PCG, established to promote a partnered approach to crime in the ACT, meets regularly to address common issues and concerns such as specific stolen property distribution trends.

For example, police intelligence revealed a supply of stolen liquor was circulating in Canberra. The PCG met and discussed the problem, which allowed the Office of Fair Trading to coordinate an approach to circumventing the supply.

Information provided to the PCG representatives at each meeting includes current crime issues being addressed by ACT Policing. The PCG process has assisted *Operation Halite* to develop networking opportunities and working relationships with the various organisations involved in the group.

## Successes

The operation has provided tangible proof of the effectiveness of policing activities which target individuals and groups.

With the focus on recidivist property offenders and high property crime locations, *Operation Halite* has apprehended recidivist offenders and has also decreased the number of burglary and motor vehicle theft offences.

Burglary offences during the financial year 2004-05 to the end of March 2005, were 27 per cent lower than the equivalent period in 2003-04. Stolen motor vehicle theft offences were also lower for the same period, down by almost a third at 31 per cent.

Juvenile recidivist motor vehicle theft offenders have been targeted by *Operation Halite* members as part of a juvenile recidivist offenders program. This program has seen successes too, with many of the targeted juveniles apprehended during the operation.

## What worked well

A feature of *Operation Halite* which sets it apart is its staff structure; the team comprises a mix of permanent and rotational staff. Superintendent (North District) Brian McDonald says this provides benefits to both the team as a whole and its members.

“Mixing permanent and rotational members in the team provides a great training and development opportunity for investigators,” Detective Superintendent McDonald said. “On top of this, rotational staff take with them experiences which will assist in better responses to incidents when they return to their districts.”

*Operation Halite* has also found success with the regular execution of search warrants as a culmination of intelligence-gathering; the recidivist juvenile motor vehicle theft offender’s program; and a number of crime prevention strategies, including follow-up activity after saturation police operations.

Perhaps the most telling sign of the operation’s success is the fact that the calendar year 2004 saw the lowest number of burglary offences reported over the previous six years (figure 1).

Further, 2004 also saw the lowest number of motor vehicle theft offences reported in the previous six years (figure 2), some 33 per cent less than the 2003 figure and 17 per cent less than the 2002 figure.

Usually, when police activity focuses on selected offences (as *Operation Halite* is doing with burglary and motor vehicle theft), a displacement is experienced, with the occurrence of other offences increasing, and therefore total offences remaining constant or even increasing. This has not occurred in Canberra over the past year, with total offences decreasing across the Territory by 16 per cent in the calendar year 2004.

## Reduction in fear of crime

Importantly, *Operation Halite* contributes to a reduction in fear of crime by members of the Canberra community, by targeting crime 'hot spots' and implementing crime prevention strategies.

Detective Superintendent McDonald agrees that the strategies used help make local residents feel safer.

"Saturation policing operations prove the success of intelligence-led policing," he said. "We have seen significant reductions in the number of reports of crime made by members of the public who live in the areas *Operation Halite* has targeted. Importantly, the operation contributes to an overall reduction of the fear of crime."

Figure 1

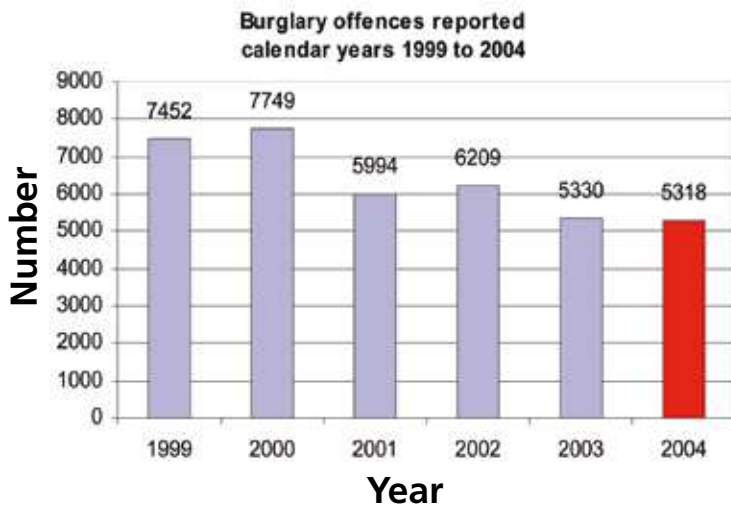
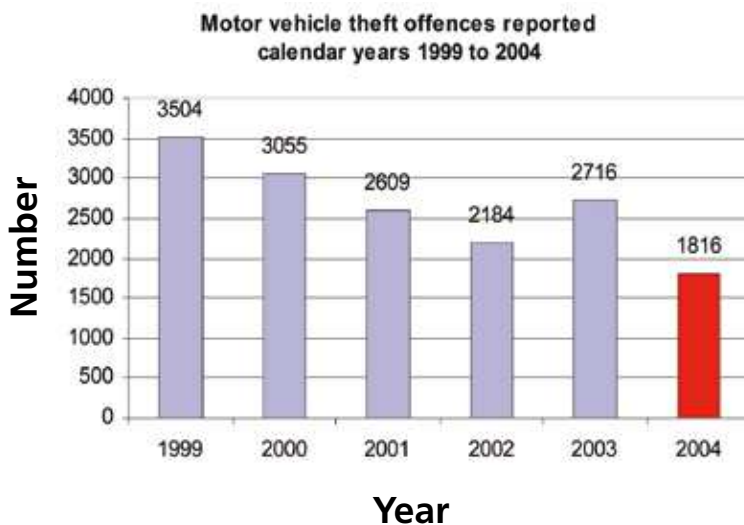


Figure 2



## The future

It is anticipated the successes of *Operation Halite*, with its dramatic impact on volume crime statistics in the Territory, will continue its achievements well into the future.

The formula is as clear as it is effective: targeting key recidivists and high crime locations will lead to the desired result of a reduction in burglaries and stolen motor vehicle offences.

"When volume crime goes down, quality of life for the Canberra community goes up. It's that simple and that's what we're all about."

(Footnotes)

1 Ratcliffe, J. 2001, "Policing Urban Burglary", Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice, no. 213, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.