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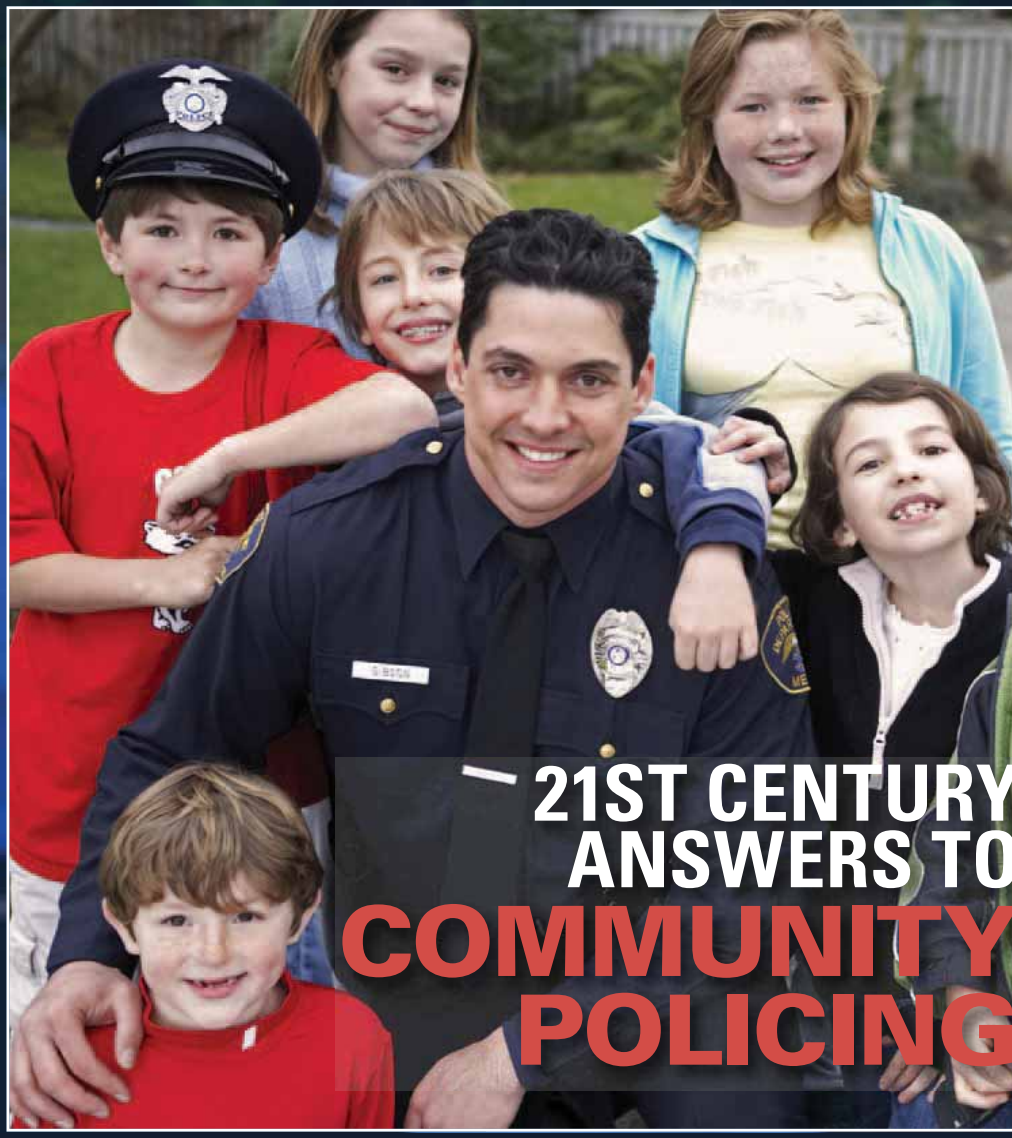

21ST CENTURY ANSWERS TO COMMUNITY POLICING

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Arresting Results:

How One District Achieved a 70 Percent Closure Rate with Video Alarms

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In addition to ensuring the safety of about 70,000 schoolchildren and thousands of staff members, the Detroit Public School Police Department (DPS PD) is responsible for protecting more than 230 facilities spread throughout Detroit's 143 square miles. A declining population and shifting student enrollment required that some buildings be closed for renovation or resale, and these vacant buildings became targets for criminals looking to strip the structures of their copper wiring, their pipes, and their other fixtures. Once the buildings are targeted, the school district bears the enormous cost to bring them back up to code and prevent their facilities from becoming blights on neighborhood property values.

In mid-2009, Detroit decided to use video intrusion alarms to protect these vacant buildings. The alarms were part of a $41.7 million district-wide security initiative that strives to make all schools safer. The district also launched a new visitors' identification badge system, requiring visitors to Detroit Public Schools high schools, career technical schools, and the district's police command center to be put through on-the-spot sex-offender registry checks as part of a security clearance system aimed at making campuses safer for students and staff. The department itself is also housed in a $5.6 million 23,000-square-foot state of the art command center and headquarters that opened in January 2011.

These new battery-powered wireless alarms that monitor Detroit school buildings send video clips of the intruders over the cell network for immediate action. Without wires, Detroit considered the installation to be inexpensive. That was a bonus since the vacant buildings were slated for resale and DPS sought to minimize new costs on those structures. Four technicians from a local security company installed the alarms over six days in 30 school buildings around the city. The results have exceeded all expectations since the program began. Working within an austerity budget, the DPS PD has proven the value of video intrusion alarms and is updating its new dispatch center and policies to build upon this success.

The statistics for burglary arrests is the highest in the department's history. In the school year beginning August 2010, 101 burglaries occurred in vacant facilities and more than 70 of them have been closed with arrests—roughly a 70 percent closure rate. Further, these buildings are not easy facilities to protect. They are large, old, brick-and-plaster structures built early in the last century, full of potential hiding places between the walls and above the ceilings. Older school buildings have many possible points of access and are difficult to secure against creative thieves. Criminals have even used the sewer systems and heating tunnels to enter and strip the vacant buildings of their copper.

Video intrusion alarms have made the difference, delivering the edge the responding officers need to make arrests. A video intrusion alarm itself is simple. An apple-sized device called a motion viewer detects the break-in with a pyroelectric (passive) infrared motion sensor, and the onboard camera (with infrared night vision) immediately sends a 10-second video clip of the intruder over the cell network to a central alarm monitoring station—in this case a facility in Exton, Pennsylvania. The monitoring station operators review the video to confirm the alarm is real and then call DPS PD dispatch while emailing the video clips to the command center as well as an alert list—in this case, to the cell phones of the executive deputy chief, command officers, and the on-duty K-9 officers. DPS officers were surprised by the quality and resolution of the cameras. The clips received were actionable video, at times in total darkness, where officers could obtain descriptions of individuals being sought.

This enables the K-9 officers to respond to what they know is an actual burglary. The short video clip of the burglar on their cellphones has proven invaluable in making arrests. Officers responding to the scene will already have a visual description of the perpetrators. As a result, even after the thieves flee the premises, the responding officers can intercept them on the street for the arrest. For those burglars that are still inside when the officers arrive, the video alarm lets the officers know where they were and when they were last seen. Of course the DPS PD still responds to the traditional alarm when the system is activated protecting the facilities.

Once video has confirmed that individuals are hiding in the premises, K-9 handlers are extremely efficient in locating the

intruders in these large facilities. It is a difficult job of hide and seek in large, vacant buildings, but police officers are winning by employing the visual description of the suspects and the use of a K-9 Team.[1] Knowing that there is a high percentage of arrests through this system encourages officers to hurry to the scene.

With video alarms, dispatch operators can tell responders how many intruders exist and what weapons or implements they are carrying. This is a big step forward for officer safety. When officers know there is a group armed with crowbars, responding officers request backup immediately and avoid unpleasant, violent surprises when they arrive.

Video sent directly to the responders' telephones has proven extremely valuable. Once the central alarm monitoring station has reviewed the video and filtered out nonevents, the central station sends the clips to the police department's command center and dispatch then sends the video clips of the break-ins directly to officers' cell phones. In several cases, when the suspect escaped before the officer arrived, officers have been able to catch the perpetrator on a subsequent break-in attempt and use the earlier video to charge the individual as a multiple offender. At the sentencing part of the trial, the prosecutor can request stiffer penalties from a judge.

Besides protecting empty buildings, the motion viewers have proven helpful in protecting high-value areas targeted by thieves, such as the school's computer rooms.

Some of the arrests recounted seem almost like fairy tales. Early on, after the citizens of Detroit became aware of these successes, a camera crew from a local news station requested permission to shadow a K-9 and his handler for an evening. The crew was out for only 15 minutes before the first arrest of three people with the cameras running. On May 8, 2009, in a single evening, eight arrests were made on three alarms: one sergeant with a couple of backup units arrested five people as a K-9 team arrested two people at another location and then finished the evening at a third location with another arrest. At 10:00 a.m. the following day, the K-9 team arrested two more suspects.

The K-9 teams have proven they are ideally suited for finding burglars hiding in these large facilities. In 2009, immediately after the systems were installed, the very first video alarm confirmed that an intruder was in the building. Responding officers spent two hours combing the facility without success. The K-9 team showed up and located the perpetrator in fewer than two minutes. Shortly thereafter, another alarm showed the suspect in the boiler room. After a futile search by the officers, the K-9 team retrieved the individual, who was hiding in the furnace. The intruder had climbed inside through the top of the boiler to hide when the officers arrived.

The Detroit experience shows that the videos of actual intruders aid the officers in making arrests. In the past, there were many alarm runs where, after inspecting the outside of the building and finding no visible sign of break-in, the officers would leave as there was no evidence of anything occurring. Unfortunately, in some of these instances, the thieves had actually entered the premises through a window or roof that was difficult to check. Another benefit of the quick video response is that the perpetrators have less time to damage the buildings, and the school's losses have been minimized. Quick arrival by law enforcement prevents thieves from using their crowbars, sledge hammers, and other demolition equipment to tear open walls and rip out plumbing or fixtures.

The only videos the responders see are those requiring immediate action. The central alarm monitoring station reviews every incoming video alarm and filters out events that do not require dispatch. The crimes in progress are sent to the 9-1-1 dispatch center and then to the responding officer. The timely delivery of these filtered short alarm clips to the responders has dramatically improved policing in the Detroit Public Schools.

The upgrades to the district's command center and their scout cars have allowed the school district to maximize the effectiveness of the video alarm systems. The police department is also considering installing mobile computers in all scout cars to receive video clips that are currently being sent only to the cell phones. ❖

Note:

[1] "One on One: John Greene," *Police K-9 Magazine* (April 8, 2010).

In late February, President Obama signed legislation that would allocate the D-Block to public safety. For information, visit http://www.theiacpblog.com. More coverage will be in the April issue of *Police Chief* magazine.

One of the goals of the D-Block wireless network initiative is to enable the delivery of streaming video to first responders. A coalition of public safety, law enforcement, and security industry professionals is supporting the D-Block initiative, working with Congress to set aside a portion of the 700 megahertz radio spectrum as a dedicated broadband network for public safety. Once the D-Block is in place, Detroit could better push high-resolution streaming video out to the scout cars and to the handheld devices of their officers. The value is obvious. If 10-second video clips can mean 150 arrests by a single officer and a 70 percent closure rate for burglaries of vacant buildings in one city, imagine the value of streaming video on a device in the palm of any responder's hand.

The central alarm monitoring centers are working hard with an international public affairs and strategic communications firm on a project called ASAP (Automated Secure Alarm Protocol) to deliver filtered, event-based video feeds from the private sector directly to law enforcement 9-1-1 dispatch centers, which then can communicate the information to the responding officers for action. With the D-Block, this would be a reality.

From a broader perspective, the arrests in Detroit are an example of what stronger partnerships between the security industry and the police can accomplish. Central alarm monitoring stations that use video alarm technology to confirm crimes and then deliver video clips through the 9-1-1 dispatch centers to the responding officers have proven to be powerful forces that have made a significant difference in arrests and public safety. Law enforcement and the security industry should continue to look for creative ways to strengthen this partnership and improve community safety. —*Keith Jentoft*