



Successful Practices & Strategies

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City of Hayward

Hayward, California

<http://www.hayward-ca.gov>

Community policing element

Community partnerships, problem solving, organizational transformation

Problem/issue

Problem properties

Problem description

Every community has its problem properties—homes, apartment buildings, or run-down businesses prone to blight and rife with criminal behavior. These public nuisances often present significant public safety challenges within the properties themselves, but they also degrade the quality of life in the surrounding community and threaten the livability of our neighborhoods. Problem properties often act as a magnet for criminal activity and antisocial behavior. These facilities—homes, apartments, or dilapidated businesses—are notorious for blighting the neighborhood, attracting bad actors, and degrading the broader sense of public safety in the surrounding community.

Community policing strategies implemented

The city of Hayward’s synchronized multi-agency safe housing (S.M.A.S.H.) program goes far beyond simply using community policing strategies to achieve law enforcement objectives. In fact, the program could best be described as a pure distillation of the community policing philosophy. The effort quite literally could not exist without regular cooperation and support from the surrounding community, a transformative organizational mindset focused exclusively on outcomes, and a creative, relentlessly adaptive problem-solving approach that leverages all resources available to achieve the stated goals.

The city’s holistic approach to dealing with these problem properties begins with “active listening” throughout the organization. The most obvious conduit for information is a record of calls for police service. In addition, valuable information occasionally arrives in the form of complaints to city officials, calls to code enforcement, and first-hand accounts from fire and medical personnel attending to incidents at or around the property. When a problem property is identified as a potential candidate for a S.M.A.S.H. operation, nearby residents who have made multiple complaints about the property are identified to facilitate any appropriate post-operation follow-up. After each operation, the police department, fire department, and code enforcement meet with on-site property management to discuss findings and strategies moving forward.



The S.M.A.S.H. program is, at its heart, a creative problem-solving structure. Instead of dealing with public nuisance properties as a pure law enforcement issue, the city employs a broader perspective, bringing all available resources to bear on the problem. This involves the engagement of the police department's district command unit and patrol division, city code enforcement, the fire department, the probation department, the city attorney's office, and our youth and family services bureau. By addressing a multi-faceted problem via all available angles, the S.M.A.S.H. program ensures that no stone is left unturned and all problems in the building—both primary and secondary—are adequately addressed.

The successful implementation of the S.M.A.S.H. program requires a transformative organizational mindset, not only among police department personnel but also among the various city departments involved in the operations. The approach is inherently collaborative, requiring a high degree of tactical cooperation and a shared commitment to pre-determined goals. For departments that usually function exclusively within their own purview and established operating procedures, S.M.A.S.H. requires creative thinking about how employees across the organization can best work together. Because every problem property presents a slightly different challenge, all participants in the program must find ways to adapt most effectively in order to ensure success.

Change and/or impact as a result of these community policing efforts

Nearly every S.M.A.S.H. operation immediately upgrades the quality of life in the surrounding community. Criminals are taken off the streets. Negligent landlords are pressed to clean up health and safety violations or be taken to court. Problem tenants are served eviction notices. Innocent tenants—often children and the elderly—who were previously subject to criminal behavior and dangerous conditions are liberated from unsafe situations and provided with advocates and resources to ensure their well-being afterward. By eliminating these hives of negativity in the community, the entire neighborhood experiences both direct and residual benefits.

Lessons learned through program implementation

Despite the overwhelming success of this program, there have been instances in which property owners have allowed or, worse yet, actively participated in the criminal or chronic nuisance behavior that the S.M.A.S.H. operations were implemented to resolve. In these circumstances, some cases resulted in costly and time consuming civil litigation. Although the city eventually prevailed, including but not limited to securing a court-ordered demolition of one problematic home, two cases took more than two years to resolve. Chronic nuisance and criminal behavior continued throughout the litigation. As a means of expediting this process and supporting the S.M.A.S.H. program's success, in 2013, the city of Hayward adopted a property related social nuisance ordinance that provides administrative authority for the city to hold property owners accountable for such behavior occurring on their properties. This



has allowed the city to work with the property owners to abate the issues, providing them guidance, training, and opportunities to participate in programs such as crime free multi-housing, neighborhood watch, and crime prevention through environmental design, to name a few. If the property owners choose to ignore their responsibilities, the city now has an option to fine the owners up to \$5,000 per violation. This ordinance has provided a viable alternative to the civil litigation process and has been successful in gaining cooperation from a variety of owners, who may have otherwise been less willing to work with the city.

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