

# SUBJECT TO DEBATE

A NEWSLETTER OF THE POLICE EXECUTIVE RESEARCH FORUM



## DNA Evidence Shows Great Potential For Identifying Burglary Suspects

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## Commissioner Frank Straub Testifies on Reducing Gang and Youth Violence

*On June 10 the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security held a hearing entitled "Addressing Gangs: What's Effective? What's Not?"*

*Chairman John Conyers, Jr. asked the witnesses not to simply call for "more laws that would result in more people being locked up," but rather to describe balanced approaches that will prevent young people from getting involved in gangs and will produce the best results in reducing violence.*

*White Plains Public Safety Commissioner Frank G. Straub honored Congressman Conyers' request, as he described a comprehensive set of initiatives that have reduced gang-related violence in his city.*

*Following are excerpts from Commissioner Straub's testimony:*



IN 2000, THE CITY OF WHITE PLAINS BEGAN TO RE-develop its downtown, replacing shuttered storefronts and vacant lots with luxury condominiums, 44-story residential and office towers, exclusive retail stores, pubs and restaurants. Downtown White Plains, like commercial districts in many cities, has rapidly become a study in contradictions, a place where the rich mingle with the poor, where a Ritz Carlton hotel is only a few blocks away from the city's public housing complexes. And like other cities, the factors that drive crime and violence—poverty, unemployment, drugs, guns and gangs—impact crime in White Plains.

### GRIM FACTS

In many cities today, the value of maintaining "street cred" has made senseless killing and assaults legitimized responses to the most minor

snubs and slights. "The violence," according to criminologist David Kennedy, "is much less about drugs and money than about girls, vendettas, and trivial social frictions. The code of the street has reached a point in which not responding to a slight can destroy a reputation, while violence is a sure way to enhance it."

A 2006 report, *A Gathering Storm: Violent Crime in America*, by the Police Executive Research Forum, underscored FBI findings that violent crime increased nationwide in 2005 and 2006, reversing the significant decreases achieved during the previous twelve years. A follow-up PERF study, *Violent Crime in America:*

*A Tale of Two Cities*, published in November 2007, reported that although some cities had begun to reverse the trend, violent crime continued to increase in other jurisdictions. Of the 168 police departments surveyed by PERF, the highest-ranked factor contributing to violent crime was gangs, followed by juvenile crime.

In response to the surge in violent crime, and the public's demand for quick, impressive action, many police departments have moved away from community policing, relying instead on traditional law enforcement strategies to fight crime. Tactical enforcement teams, "stop and frisk" initiatives, neighborhood sweeps, gang injunctions, and public housing "bar outs" (a "no-trespass" policy used by public housing authorities to reduce drug activity and other crimes) have been used to target and reduce violent crime.

In times of crisis, police and political leaders have declared "crime emergencies," increasing patrols in hard-hit neighborhoods,

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# Policing and Technology: Tapping the Potential to Protect Communities

THIS ISSUE OF *SUBJECT TO DEBATE* HAS A STORY about an important new study by the Urban Institute, which showed that DNA evidence has enormous potential to help police solve burglaries and other property crimes.

Experiments conducted in five jurisdictions showed that when police can find a drop of blood, a strand of hair, or other biological evidence left at a crime scene by a burglar, it doubles the chances that they'll make an arrest in the case. This works because many burglars have already been convicted of other crimes that resulted in their DNA profiles being entered into criminal justice databases.

As I read about this DNA research, I started to think about how many changes in technology we have seen in policing in the last couple of decades. It seems that almost every day, we read about a new technological advancement that is causing major changes in how police go about their jobs. In fact, you can make a case that technology has played a key part in changing the very nature of police work. Instead of just responding to crime, police now work to prevent the next crimes from being committed. Burglaries have traditionally had low clearance rates compared to other crimes, but the Urban Institute study suggests that we can bring burglary rates down if we use DNA technology to identify and incapacitate the repeat offenders who commit dozens of burglaries every year.

Here's a little perspective on police technology: Technological advances in policing are almost entirely a development of the last 30 years or so. In 1967, President Lyndon Johnson's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice found that police agencies were suffering from an almost total lack of contact with the scientific and technological communities. In the 1960s, there hadn't been any major advances in police technology since the development of two-way radios in patrol cars in the 1920s and 1930s, the commission found. We didn't even have a 911 system to handle emergency calls.

Compare that to the situation today, beginning with the hundreds of ways that computers help police to measure and analyze crime patterns; maintain sophisticated databases at the local, state, and federal levels regarding crimes, criminals, firearms, DNA, fingerprints, and other information; monitor officers' performance; bring information about local crime conditions to community residents; and so on. There have also been tremendous technological advances in police communications gear; less lethal weapons; and cameras at crime hot spots and in patrol cars, to name a few areas.

Technology clearly is a force-multiplier that enables officers to be more productive. But for police executives, technology poses a complex set of challenges. A chief, working with a limited budget, has to pick and choose among the different types of technology. Patrol car cameras or the latest type of bullet-resistant vests? CEDs or a gunshot detection system? And once the chief decides which types of technology to buy, he or she may need to study a lot of options if there are multiple vendors offering comparable equipment.

Because policing in the United States is largely a local function, with some 17,000 separate agencies, these decisions are made in a fragmented way. There is little pooling of law enforcement purchasing on technology. This makes it more difficult for chiefs and vendors to create an efficient marketplace.

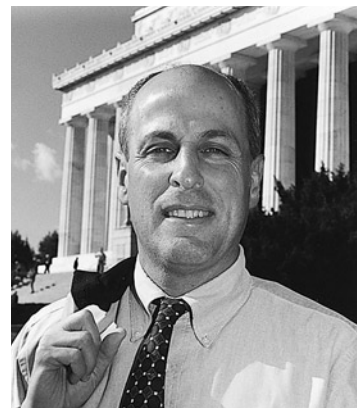
Chiefs who have a strong interest in technology advise their peers to make it their business to keep up with the technology of policing. This is a major new responsibility compared to the situation a generation ago. Police chiefs should not get bogged down in technological details, the experts tell us, but they should know enough to judge different options.

And knowledgeable chiefs also caution against getting caught up in the "gee whiz" factor of the latest technology. Technology can be very seductive, and sometimes people begin to view technology as an end in itself. When considering whether to spend the time and money on a new technology, chiefs should keep their eye on the ball and keep asking themselves, "How is this going to help my officers more effectively serve the communities they work in and prevent crime?"

There also are many cautionary tales about technology projects that turn into nightmares. One study of information technology projects in the private sector found that more than half of the projects ended up costing nearly twice their original estimates, and that nearly one-third of the projects were *cancelled* before they could be completed!

I believe we need to find a way to develop research on police technology. Too often, police agencies in the United States are forced to try out new technologies before anyone has conducted comprehensive studies of how well they work in practice. Currently, for example, a number of agencies are trying out gunshot detection systems, and some are reporting that the systems work well. But it would have been better if police chiefs could have looked to some entity to evaluate the effectiveness of the systems *before* police agencies were asked to commit funding to them. By contrast, in Great Britain, the Home Office arranged for extensive testing of Conducted Energy Devices and then authorized their use, rather than having individual police agencies experiment with the devices.

In the United States, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) does impressive research but is severely underfunded to meet the evolving challenges faced



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# DNA Evidence Shows Great Potential For Identifying Burglary Suspects, NIJ Says

WHEN POLICE ARE ABLE TO COLLECT DNA EVIDENCE at the scene of a burglary or other property crime, it doubles the likelihood they will be able to make an arrest in the case, according to a study released by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) on June 16.

The study, conducted by the Urban Institute, was based in an experiment involving the law enforcement agencies in five jurisdictions: Denver; Topeka, Kansas; Phoenix; Los Angeles; and Orange County, California. In each city, police collected biological evidence at up to 500 property crime scenes, and then randomly assigned each case to a “treatment” group or a control group. The cases were investigated normally, with one difference: In the treatment group, the DNA was processed and searched against the Combined DNA Index System (CODIS), which includes DNA profiles of persons previously convicted of crimes.

This is what the research team found:

- **Identifying suspects:** A suspect was identified in 31 percent of the cases where biological evidence was obtained and subjected to DNA testing. In the control group cases where biological evidence was obtained but not tested, only 12 percent resulted in the identification of a suspect.
- **Arrests:** In the treatment group, where DNA was tested, there was an arrest in 16 percent of the cases, compared to only 8 percent of the control group cases.
- **DNA vs. fingerprints:** DNA evidence led to a much higher number of suspect identifications and arrests than did fingerprint evidence. In cases where both fingerprints and biological evidence were collected, suspects were identified through CODIS 16 percent of the time, compared to 8 percent for the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS).
- **Prior records:** Because DNA identification works largely by linking crime scene evidence to convicted offender databases, the suspects identified by DNA had an average of 5.6 prior felony arrests and 2.9 prior felony convictions—more than three times the comparable figures for the control group suspects identified through traditional means.
- **Collection of evidence by patrol officers:** Evidence collected by crime scene technicians was no more likely to yield a DNA profile and subsequent CODIS match than evidence collected by patrol officers.
- **Blood and saliva are best:** Blood and saliva samples were significantly more likely to yield usable DNA profiles than samples of cells taken from items that the suspect touched. Whenever possible, evidence collectors should acquire entire items rather than swab an item for evidence to maximize the possibility of obtaining a usable DNA profile.
- **Costs:** Processing a single case with DNA evidence added about \$1,400 to the cost of handling the case.

“The information gained from this study provides valuable information about collecting DNA at burglary scenes,” said Jeffrey L. Sedgwick, acting Assistant Attorney General for the Office of Justice Programs, in releasing a report on the study. “It could lead to major changes in law enforcement policy and practice.”

In the United States criminal justice system, DNA analysis has been used almost entirely to investigate violent crimes. But Great Britain has successfully employed DNA forensics to investigate property crimes on a national scale since 2001.

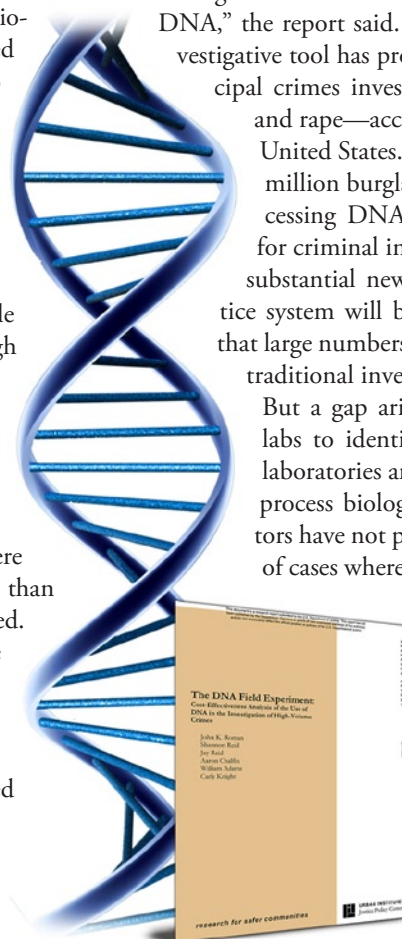
The report indicated that there is enormous potential for using DNA to solve residential burglaries, commercial burglaries, thefts from automobiles, and other property crimes. And if police can use DNA to target repeat offenders, they could reduce burglary and theft rates, because “there is substantial evidence that many burglars engage in persistent offending,” the report suggested. For example, a study of incoming California prison inmates found that of the prisoners who admitted having committed at least one burglary, they reported committing an average of more than 15 burglaries per year.

The potential for solving property crimes with DNA evidence will almost certainly increase as the number of offenders in the CODIS databases continues to increase, increasing the likelihood that DNA testing will yield a hit in a given case.

However, the usefulness of DNA evidence will likely be limited by cost factors rather than technological issues, the study suggested. In the five jurisdictions studied, “limited resources for these agencies were an important barrier to expanding the use of DNA,” the report said. “Expanding the use of DNA as an investigative tool has profound implications. In 2006, the principal crimes investigated using DNA evidence—murder and rape—accounted for about 110,000 crimes in the United States. That same year, there were more than 2 million burglaries. If identifying, collecting, and processing DNA evidence becomes the national norm for criminal investigations of property crimes without substantial new processing capacity, the criminal justice system will be overwhelmed. Our research suggests that large numbers of offenders not currently identified by traditional investigations could be identified via DNA.

But a gap arises because the capacity of police and labs to identify and collect DNA is limited, crime laboratories are severely constrained in their ability to process biological evidence in volume, and prosecutors have not prepared for the impact of large numbers of cases where DNA evidence is the primary source of offender identification.”

The 164-page report, *The DNA Field Experiment: Cost-Effectiveness Analysis of the Use of DNA in the Investigation of High-Volume Crimes*, is available on the Internet at <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/222318.pdf>.



establishing curfews, and cordoning off neighborhoods to create “safe zones.” Closed-circuit camera networks, gunshot detection and location systems, and facial and pattern recognition technologies have vastly expanded surveillance capabilities and created police omnipresence. This has created tensions between the police and law-abiding citizens in some minority communities.

The strong emphasis on “law and order,” with the resulting increase in incarceration, has torn a hole in our social fabric. Incarceration breaks up families and disrupts social networks; deprives siblings, spouses and parents of emotional and financial support; and ruins opportunities for young people to finish school and get jobs. People released from jails and prisons find it difficult to reintegrate into their communities. They are virtually unemployable, find it difficult to secure adequate housing, and suffer from a lack of medical, mental health, and drug treatment services.

A street culture has been created among young African-American men in which serving time in prison is normal and even valued. Even more worrying is the sense of hopelessness experienced by young men in our hardest-hit African-American neighborhoods, many of whom believe their lives will end in prison or violently on the street.

Communities of color suffer from the imposition of aggressive and indiscriminate police tactics as well as from the failure of such tactics to bring peace and stability to their neighborhoods. Stepped-up enforcement of public ordinances and the use of aggressive stop-and-frisk tactics can increase tension between the police and minority communities which view such tactics as intrusive, oppressive, misguided and frequently based on racial profiling if they are not implemented appropriately and monitored closely.

Although it appears that fostering a sense of trust in the police is difficult in disadvantaged neighborhoods, difficult does not mean impossible. When citizens believe they have been treated fairly and with respect, they tend to grant more legitimacy to the police and are more likely to engage with them in solving issues that threaten neighborhood stability.

### **THE WHITE PLAINS PARADIGM**

In 2006, a series of violent events—a gang-related fatal stabbing in March, a fatal shooting in May, two more youth-involved stabbings in September, as well as a “shootout” in Winbrook, the city’s

largest public housing complex—brought the realities of street violence to White Plains. All of the events occurred in and around the city’s public housing complexes, except for the September stabbing, which occurred in the heart of downtown, a few blocks from a new luxury condominium and entertainment complex.

The events were driven by street disputes—wearing gang “colors” in the wrong neighborhood, retaliation for a robbery, a fight over girls, stares and an exchange of words as two groups of young people faced off in the heart of downtown. And although crime had dropped significantly since 2002, the community and the media called for an immediate police response to end the violence and restore order in the city’s downtown.

### **STEPPED-UP ENFORCEMENT**

The police department increased foot, bike, mounted and motorcycle patrols in the downtown. The Neighborhood Conditions Unit stepped up quality-of-life enforcement in crime hot spots and in the city’s public housing complexes. The Intelligence Unit identified and focused on high-risk offenders and their “crews.” Detectives arrested gang members at the same time the Community Policing Division began conducting home visits to interrupt potential violence. Representatives from the police department and the city’s Youth Bureau met with members of the community, activists, and black ministers who expressed concern regarding the increased gang activity, violence, and conflicts downtown and in public housing.

The meetings were very challenging. Community members demanded that the police department take action at the same time they angrily described conflicts with the police and past incidents that generated animosity and distrust in the African-American community.

### **YOUTH-POLICE INITIATIVE**

Following the meetings, the police department and the city’s youth bureau partnered with the North American Family Institute (NAFI), a Massachusetts-based social service organization, to develop and implement a program to reduce violence among the city’s youth and improve community-police relations.

The first White Plains session of the Youth-Police Initiative (YPI) brought together young African-American men from Winbrook and police officers assigned to the neighborhood conditions unit (NCU) to discuss the recent violence, gang activity, and youth-police interactions. NCU officers were purposely selected because their assignments in public housing complexes and downtown



frequently placed them in “conflict-prone” situations with the young men. In subsequent training sessions, recruit officers participated as part of their field training, and other sessions matched police officers assigned to neighborhood “hot zones” and the young men and women who lived there.

As the stories unfold, the youth and police officers frequently find out that they are not that different. For example, during a recent session, a female officer discussed her teenage pregnancy, her relationship with her mother, run-ins with the police, and the experience of being arrested. She discussed how she hated the police as a teenager and believed they picked on her because she was Hispanic. She also told the young women that after she became an emergency medical technician, she saw police officers helping people who really needed their help, and eventually decided to become a police officer.

A series of role-playing exercises, developed by the participants, provide an opportunity to see how the actions and language of the youth and police officers can escalate street interactions. De-escalation techniques are discussed and practiced to build effective communication and to resolve highly charged incidents. The goal is to get the cops and the kids to drop the warrior mentality, stop “dissing” each other, and build mutual respect.

### EXERCISES HELD IN PUBLIC VIEW

Team-building exercises are intentionally held outdoors, in the heart of Winbrook and other public housing complexes, so the residents can see them occurring. This very public demonstration of youth-police interaction has generated significant interest, curiosity, and favorable responses from the residents. For many, this may be the first time they’ve seen the police engaged in positive interactions with the young men and women who live in the neighborhood.

The final YPI event is a celebration dinner for the participants, the young men and women’s families, political and religious leaders, and community members to recognize the participants and their success in completing the program. At the first dinner, about 50 people attended, including the participants. At the fourth dinner, held in April 2008, over 200 people attended, and support for the program continues to build among the city’s community, religious and political leaders.

### STEP-UP PROGRAM HELPS TROUBLED YOUTHS

There is no single response to youth violence and gang involvement. Long-term solutions require comprehensive, collaborative responses that offer real alternatives, individualized services, support and mentoring. The youth bureau’s Step Up program is a critical component of the city’s efforts to combat gang activity and street violence. At-risk or gang-involved youth come into the program in one of three ways. Police officers refer youth to Step Up as an alternative to incarceration, or as part of the department’s prisoner re-entry program. Youth Bureau outreach workers identify youth in neighborhood hot zones. And most recently, some of the young men and women participating in Step Up have recruited their friends.

Once engaged, the young men and women receive individualized case management and wrap-around services to address personal issues such as truancy, poor school performance, unemployment, fatherhood/motherhood, and drug and alcohol addiction.



White Plains police meet with youths for team-building exercises and other events

### ENFORCING THE LAW AND DEALING WITH THE CAUSES OF VIOLENCE

Six years ago, the White Plains police department committed to a policing paradigm that would fight crime on all fronts. On one front, the department uses traditional strategies to target high-rate offenders, their illegal activities, and neighborhood hot spots. On the other, the department’s community policing division has taken the lead in developing and implementing non-traditional programs to target the factors that drive crime and violence. During the past six years, serious crime has declined by 40 percent to the lowest level

in 42 years. There has not been a homicide in the city since May 2006, and serious crime continues to fall in 2008.

The White Plains police department did not let a series of violent incidents define the city or allow gang activity to take hold. The police department took the lead, adopted a strong approach to end the violence and built effective partnerships during the past six years. In the end, the White Plains policing paradigm confirms that the police matter and that by their actions, enforcement and community building, they can shape and define the factors that impact crime in the local context.



# Meth360<sup>®</sup>: Uniting Communities to Fight Methamphetamine

BY VERENA HUETTENEDER

THE PARTNERSHIP FOR A DRUG-FREE AMERICA, IN collaboration with the Police Executive Research Forum, has launched Meth360<sup>®</sup>, a multidisciplinary community outreach program designed to improve police agencies' efforts to deal with the impact of methamphetamine, and to mobilize parents and concerned citizens to take action to prevent meth use.

Created in 2006 and pilot-tested in four regions (upstate New York, Oklahoma, Washington State, and Virginia), Meth360 establishes teams of law enforcement officers and substance abuse prevention and treatment professionals to deliver meth awareness presentations before local business and civic organizations, schools, and parent groups.

By encouraging the police and substance abuse professionals to work in teams and to bring their own experiences and anecdotes to the presentation, Meth360 offers audiences a "360-degree" perspective of the meth issue. For the team members, Meth360 helps build bridges between law enforcement and social services providers in their efforts to protect families and communities from substance abuse.

"Meth is unique in its ability to harm innocent, unsuspecting people, whether it's a child of a meth user or new homeowners who are unaware that their kitchen once housed a meth lab," says Mike Townsend, executive vice president at the Partnership. "With PERF's assistance, we created Meth360 to show communities what happens when meth takes hold, and to empower them to help prevent the spread of the drug."

PERF's role in the Meth360 program is threefold: conducting a needs assessment of law enforcement and community capabilities; identifying and recruiting lead law enforcement agencies and providing technical assistance; and conducting program evaluation research following implementation of the program.

"Meth360 has aided many communities by delivering the extremely powerful anti-drug message that is at the heart of this campaign," says Gerard Murphy, Director of Homeland Security and Development at PERF. "This program will have a long-lasting

impact on our society, our communities, neighborhoods, homes and families across the country, and we are extremely pleased to be part of this commendable effort."

Program evaluation research shows that 100 percent of presenters who responded to a survey would recommend Meth360 to communities that are interested in raising awareness about meth use, and 98 percent stated that the multidisciplinary approach increased the program's credibility.

Audience evaluations in the pilot areas have indicated that 93 percent of those who saw the presentation said Meth360 taught them about methamphetamine and 86 percent reported they would take action to help protect their community against meth use.

"Communities must be involved if we are to win the fight against drugs," said Sgt. James Cox of the Fairfax County Police Department, one of the first agencies participating in Meth360. "Meth360 has aided our department in forming partnerships with the communities we serve—and with our own government agencies. These partnerships will be long-lasting and treasured, and if other jurisdictions have the same success we have had with Meth360, I truly believe methamphetamine can be a drug of the past."

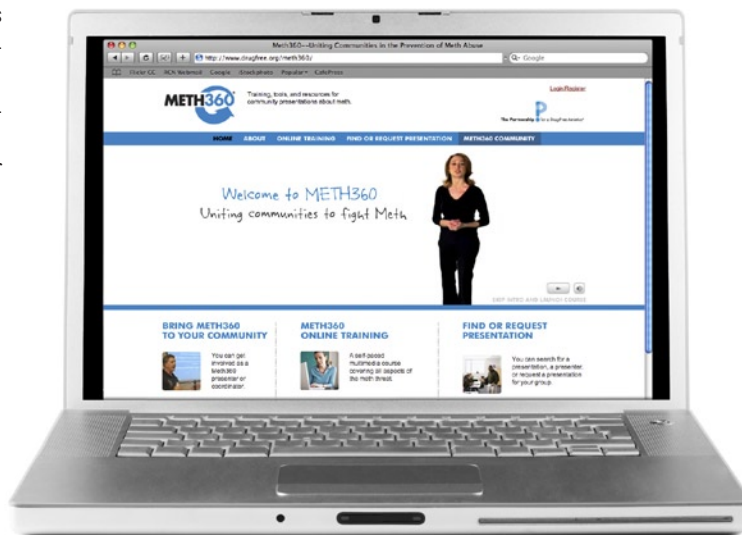
To help communities adopt and implement Meth360, the Partnership has provided program participants with a new Web site, [www.drugfree.org/meth360](http://www.drugfree.org/meth360), at which they can train themselves to deliver and coordinate presentations. This resource

is available to all agencies, free of charge, and includes all materials needed to implement Meth360.

To learn more about Meth360, please visit the website or email [meth360@drugfree.org](mailto:meth360@drugfree.org).



Verena Huettener is assistant director of public affairs for the Partnership for a Drug Free America.



The Meth360 Web site is at [www.drugfree.org/meth360](http://www.drugfree.org/meth360).


by the myriad of new technologies and challenges in the field. NIJ must receive the support it needs to get research out to practitioners.

Police executives find themselves consumed with a wide variety of duties every day, so immersing themselves in complex issues of technology can seem like a low priority. There is a tendency to depend on staff members who have expertise in technology. But chiefs themselves need to be involved, because the technology experts may have only a limited understanding of the operational needs of the police department or the broad policy implications of adopting a particular type of technology.

Another consideration is that, like just about everything else in policing, technology issues should involve input from the community. Chiefs improve their chances of getting technology that will actually help reduce crime if they make sure that the technology is something that local residents will support enthusiastically.

Chiefs also need to consider how their officers will react to a new technology. For example, some departments are considering Vehicle Locator systems that allow dispatchers or others to know where a patrol car is at any given moment. This has obvious advantages for managing situations where police need to seal off an area quickly, or to help an officer who is injured or otherwise needs help but is unable to use a radio. But some officers and unions are concerned that Vehicle Locator systems will be used to “spy” on officers’ activities. Chiefs should try to work out issues like this in advance and talk through these ideas with those who will be most affected. And even when technology is not of a sensitive nature, chiefs should realize that some officers will fear or resist any change in the systems they use, so training will be necessary.

There is no doubt in my mind that today’s law enforcement agencies are much more effective than those of a generation ago at actually preventing crime and bringing down crime rates. And no one would question that technology has played an enormous role in that fundamental change in the quality of policing.

For today’s chiefs, the challenge is to allocate a certain amount of “mind share” to keeping up with advances in technology, as they manage their organizations with expanding responsibilities, increased costs, and shrinking resources. Properly managed, technology can have a huge impact on the quality of life in the communities our officers serve. 

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Reserve the Date!  
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