

New Police Motto: To Predict and Serve?

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Description

Police in Santa Cruz, California are using a new strategy to fight crime, called predictive policing. By using a new computer program that takes up-to-the-minute data interpreting patterns in a neighborhood, they are able to predict where and when crimes are likely to happen.

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Transcript

New Police Motto: To Predict and Serve?

LESTER HOLT, anchor:

We're back now with a new tactic in law enforcement that sounds like it's straight out of a sci-fi flick, predicting where and when a crime is going to be committed. It might remind you of the plot from the Tom Cruise thriller "Minority Report." But in one California city, it's real life. We get our report tonight from NBC's Peter Alexander.

PETER ALEXANDER reporting:

When Santa Cruz police received reports of a possible assault this week...

Unidentified Police Officer #1: Both you guys, put your hands up!

ALEXANDER: ...Sergeant Christian La Moss was right around the corner.

Sergeant CHRISTIAN La MOSS: We can't be everywhere at once. This was a neighborhood that was identified as a location that needed extra patrols in. We came here, did extra patrols and we were...

ALEXANDER: Stopped a crime.

Sgt. La MOSS: We were able to stop a crime in progress before it got worse.

(On radio) Third and Clifford.

ALEXANDER: La Moss wasn't there just by chance. He was directed to that area by a computer program that uses up-to-the-minute data to find patterns and predict where and when crimes are likely to happen in the future.

Mr. MARTIN SHORT (UCLA Mathematician): We liken this to earthquakes leading to aftershocks. Just like the original crime, many crimes may follow it.

ALEXANDER: It's called predictive policing.

Mr. ZACH FRIEND (Santa Cruz Police Department): In this 500-by-500-foot area, crimes have been occurring that the model picked up on.

ALEXANDER: This is a place you guys are going to revisit.

Mr. FRIEND: This is a place we're visiting today.

Unidentified Police Officer #2: Pass around a couple of the maps.

ALEXANDER: Before each shift, police officers are alerted to several hot spots, locations where they'll perform extra checks. Here in Santa Cruz, early indications suggest the program is working. In the first six months of this year, there were nearly a dozen burglaries or car thefts in this parking garage alone. Last month with the targeted patrols in place, there were none. Police arrested two women at that garage found casing cars, one for an outstanding felony warrant, the other for carrying illegal drugs.

In fact, burglaries here were down 27 percent in July, compared to the same month a year ago.

Nationwide with city budgets being slashed and police forces dwindling, several cities and states are considering similar predictive policing programs, including Boston, Chicago and Los Angeles.

Captain SEAN MALINOWSKI (Los Angeles Police Department): When times get tough, departments shrink in size and we need to be even more efficient and effective in how we deploy our scarce resources.

ALEXANDER: A new crime-fighting strategy where the motto for police isn't just to protect, but to predict and serve. Peter Alexander, NBC News, Santa Cruz, California.