

METAL THEFT AND VEHICLE CRIME

1. INTRODUCTION

Tackling vehicle crime and metal theft has been a priority for the Safer New Forest Partnership for the last 11 and 4 years respectively. For clarity it is necessary to first define what is meant by the terms.

1.1 Vehicle crime categories

The police record both domestic and commercial vehicle crime in the following way:

- **Thefts and attempted thefts of vehicles** where the intent is to permanently deprive the owner.
- **Unauthorised taking of a vehicle** where intent to permanently deprive the owner is not evident – this would typically include ‘joyriding’ where the car is later recovered.
- **Aggravated vehicle taking** where a vehicle once taken is known to have been driven dangerously, damaged or caused an accident.
- **Thefts and attempted thefts from a vehicle** targeting property in or on the vehicle (this includes vehicle parts eg catalytic convertors, fuel).
- **Interfering with a motor vehicle** is to interfere with anything in or on a vehicle with the intention of stealing the vehicle or anything from the vehicle or taking without owners consent. This includes attempts to drive away without apparent intent to permanently deprive the owner.

The taking of vehicles during robberies (often termed car-jacking) is included within the robbery offence group.

1.2 Definition of metal theft

“Metal Theft” is not a separate crime defined in law, nor is it separately flagged in crime datasets. The offence is commonly understood to refer to thefts of items for the value of their constituent metals, most commonly non-ferrous metals including copper, lead and aluminium.

Targets for metal theft commonly include theft of copper wire and cable from transport and utility networks causing disruption to connected networks, theft of lead from churches and other heritage buildings, thefts of catalytic converters and theft of street furniture such as aluminium road signs and steel barriers

2. REPORTED CRIME INCIDENTS

2.1 Vehicle Crime incidents reported to the police (long term trend)

Figure 1 below demonstrates the number and trend in thefts from motor vehicles for the period 1 May 2010 to April 2013. Figure 2 demonstrates the theft and attempted theft of motor vehicles for the same period.

Figure 1

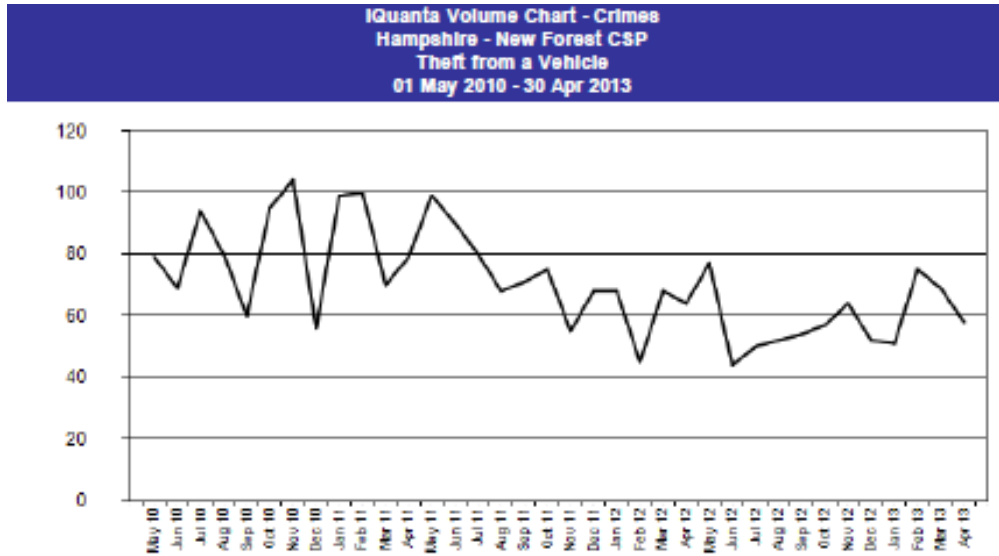
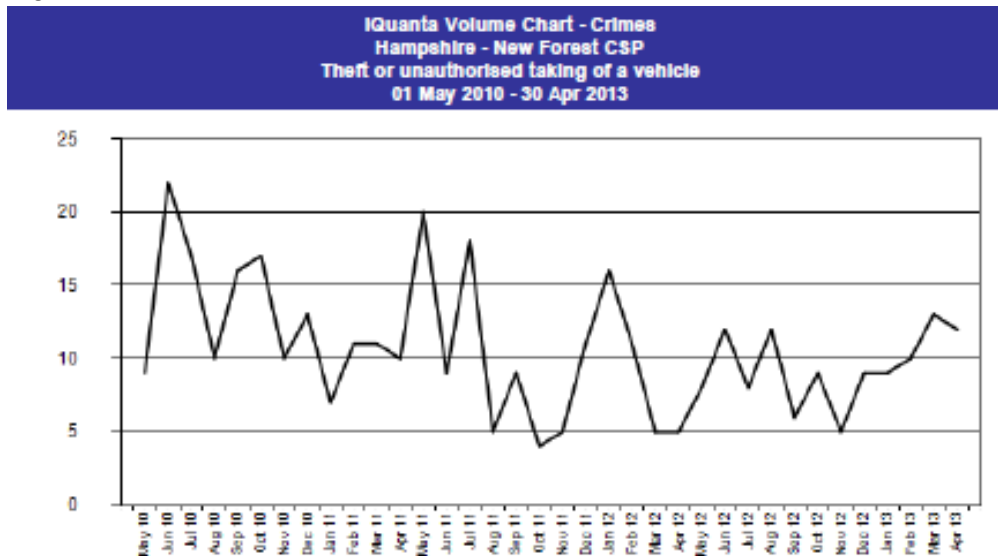


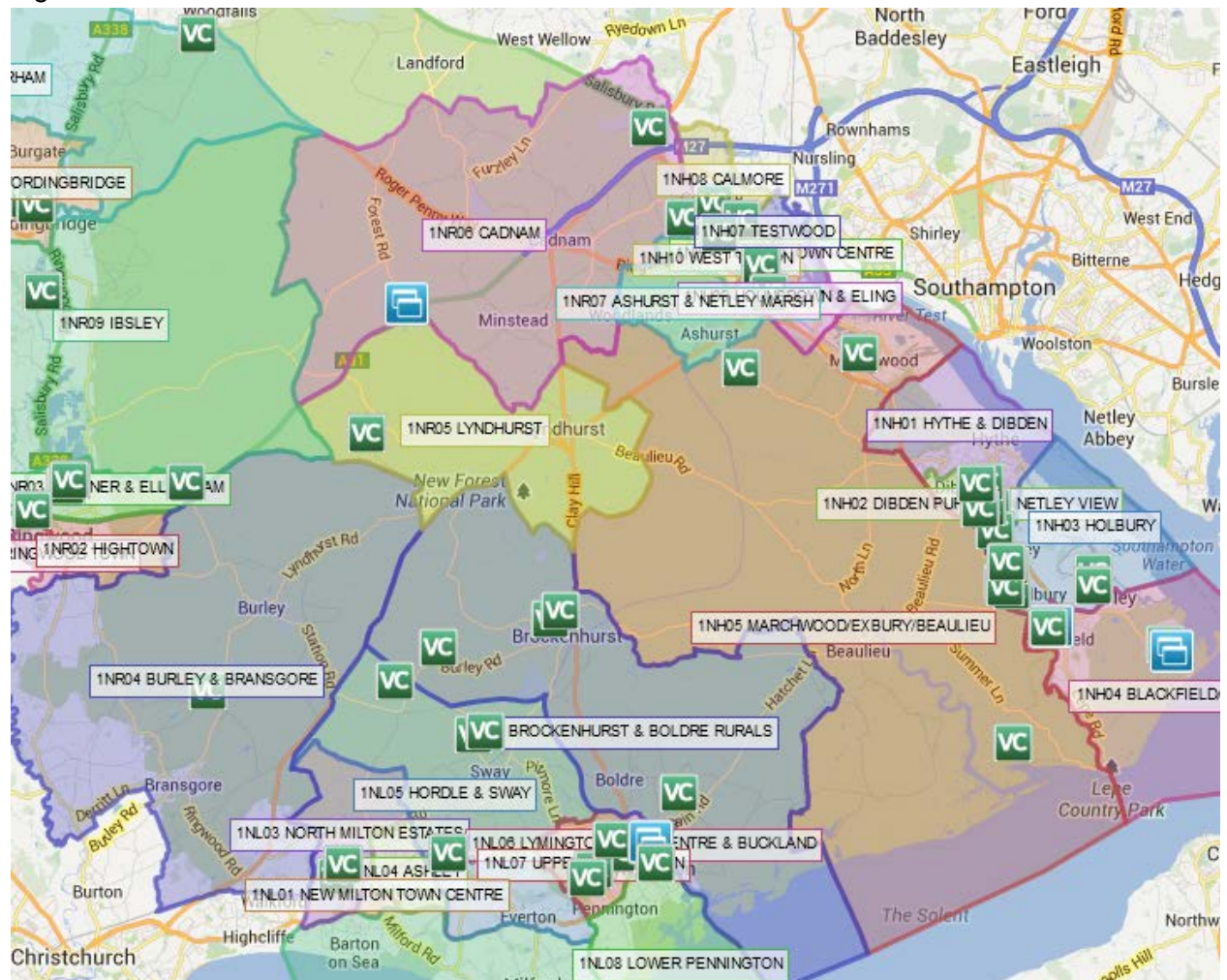
Figure 2



2.2 Vehicle Crime incidents reported to the police (May 2013)

An extract from Crime Reports (www.crimereports.co.uk – a publicly accessible website giving up to date access to crimes reported to police) is shown in Figure 3. The data shown is for vehicle crime reports from 1st – 31st May 2013. Multiple incidents are shown as blue squares.

Figure 3.



2.3 Metal theft incidents reported to the police

Metal theft data is available to the Safer New Forest partnership and partners only via the analytical products produced by the Partnership Intelligence analyst. The strategic assessment 2012 – 2013 identified vehicle models at higher risk of catalytic convertor theft and the monthly Operational Joint Action Group (Ops JAG) are notified of trends and issues regarding specific types of metal theft activity that the analyst has identified. Lead roofing material and copper have been consistently identified as high risk for theft.

3. PREVENTION ACTIVITY VEHICLE CRIME AND METAL THEFT

The following are a selection of the activities commissioned by the Operational Joint Action Group:

3.1 Acquisitive Crime Action Group

This is a specialist group of partners (includes Dorset and Wiltshire Police, and insurance representatives) that is convened when a specific threat and acquisitive crime trend is identified in the New Forest area. It develops and implements joint action plans covering prevention, enforcement and intelligence improvement.

- 3.2 Posters on Single Information Points – Forestry Commission Car Parks
'Hotspot' rural car parks are identified by the analyst and posters are displayed in these localities advising people to not leave valuables in their vehicles.
- 3.3 Environmental Visual audits and remedial activities
'Hotspot' localities (rural and urban) are identified by the analyst and subsequently visited by the Hampshire County Council Accredited Community Safety Officers who undertake environmental visual audits. These audits are intended to identify any target hardening activity that would assist in reducing this crime. Particular attention has been paid to identified high risk churches and car parks.
- 3.4 Yellow cards
Yellow laminated cards stating that 'No Valuables' have been left in the vehicle are available free of charge from NFDC information centres. Information office staff offer parking clock purchasers a free yellow card.
- 3.5 Community events
The partnership aims to attend as many community events as is practicable in order to give key crime prevention messages. The yellow cards are handed out to community members and a brief intervention is given where appropriate on removing valuables from vehicles.
- 3.6 Bag it
Hampshire County Council has funded the provision of lightweight rucksacks that the Accredited Community Safety Officers are handing out to walkers setting off from New Forest rural car parks. The car parks targeted are identified by the analyst.
- 3.7 Posters for high risk buildings
Safer New Forest worked with Ecclesiastical Insurance to develop and make available posters for buildings considered high risk of metal theft. These posters are available from the Safer New Forest website and are placed on and around buildings asking people to report suspicious activity. Figure 4 shows the poster developed for schools.
- 3.8 Catalytic Convertor marking kits
The Ops JAG recognised the difficulties in encouraging the community to mark their catalytic convertors; some members were unaware of what it looked like and whether they had one or not. Businesses were identified throughout the New Forest and a letter was written to each by the Ops JAG chair Cllr Cleary enclosing a catalytic convertor pack. The letter explained the issues affecting the community and asked the garages to consider offering 'cat' marking as a service.

Figure 4



3.9 Communications releases

The monthly Ops JAG commissions communications activities from the partnership communications officer. These pieces of work can vary from being district wide to neighbourhood based. As a recent example a spate of thefts from vehicles parked on driveways was identified as occurring in the Barton on Sea area. Information on what was happening and how to prevent it was printed in the neighbourhood newsletters eg parish magazines and the local newspaper and yellow cards were made available to pick up at the local post office.

All media releases are loaded to Safer New Forest website and tweeted.

3.10 DNA grease

DNA grease packs and signage have been made available to buildings affected by metal theft that are considered high risk of repeat victimisation.

3.11 DNA spray

DNA spray was made available to Parish Councils to buy at cost price in order to mark war memorials, plaques and other metal equipment such as grave flower holders.

3.12 DNA diesel marking

The marking fluid was made available to business premises considered high risk of repeat victimisation of diesel theft from the vehicle's tanks. This piece of work also required extensive police support in order to stop check vehicles acting suspiciously and have available sampling kits for any fuel found to be on the vehicle.

3.13 Integrated Offender Management

A multi-agency partnership of Probation, Prison, Police, Society of St James and NFDC agrees and manages a cohort of offenders considered to be having the most impact on the local community. The cohort consists of prolific and priority offenders, those subject to short term custody, those considered high risk of breach of community sentence, and those arrested multiple times. A strict matrix of

scoring for entry to the cohort is adhered to however the matrix allows for local flexibility of priorities and especial weighting is given in the New Forest area to offenders associated with theft from vehicles.

4. ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITY

The enforcement activity is led by the police and is linked to the issues identified at the Ops JAG and through the core police intelligence and management processes. Examples of the enforcement activity undertaken include:

4.1 Acquisitive Crime Team

This is a specialist team set up by the Chief Inspector. It is focused on all house burglaries and vehicle crime. It has undertaken considerable activity to catch and convict offenders stealing from vehicles. Recently two Salisbury based males pleaded guilty in relation to theft from vehicle with the case adjourned until 26th June for sentencing.

4.2 Trap Vehicles

These are vehicles that are parked and left in high risk locations. Images and data in relation to offenders who break into the vehicle are recorded.

4.3 Vehicle stop checks

Countrywatch co-ordinates multi-agency stop checks of light goods and rural vehicles operating in the New Forest area. The agencies involved include Environment Agency, DWP, Home Office (Border Control), DVLA, Police and Licensing. It is recognised that offenders committing metal theft and theft from vehicles are also using vehicles unlawfully and this form of operation has resulted in a number of vehicle seizures and convictions for crimes.

4.4 High visibility patrols

These are undertaken at locations identified by the analyst and acquisitive crime team. This also includes stop checking of individuals in areas of high risk.

4.5 NFDC Licensing Services

All scrap metal dealers are required to register with the Council and renew their registration every three years. The Licensing Team undertakes enforcement investigations of scrap metal dealers when either a complaint is made or non-compliance is suspected and the police can attend and inspect the books of the dealer.

4.6 NFDC Parking and Civil Enforcement Officers

Suspicious activity and vehicles observed by NFDC civil enforcement officers are notified to the police. This information is particularly helpful as it is timely and issues are able to be deployed to by the police.

5. INTELLIGENCE ACTIVITY

The purpose of gathering intelligence is to identify individuals or groups of individuals in an effort to anticipate, prevent, or monitor possible criminal activity. The intelligence gathered within Community Safety partners assists the Ops JAG, partners and police to commission

actions and resources in the most beneficial manner. Some examples of intelligence related activities include:

5.1 Community Information

A considerable number of communications to the community are undertaken using news media, websites, and local media channels eg noticeboards to let the community know what crime is being reported, what the partners are doing to tackle the problem and what members of the community can do to help prevent them becoming a victim. The Ops JAG is focused on prevention advice and encouraging people to report suspicious activity.

5.2 BT Cabling

BT cabling is particularly at risk of being stolen from underground conduits. New cabling is security marked and is at less risk, however criminal groups pose as lawful BT technicians with branded vehicles and clothing. BT operates a specialist call handler that community members can telephone to notify BT of work that appears to be ongoing in their neighbourhood; this service has been promoted within the New Forest as loss of phones and broadband within the community causes huge negative impact.

6. SCRAP METAL DEALERS

The theft of metal is a growing international problem, with figures released by the Home Office in January 2013 suggesting 67,000 metal thefts from commercial properties in 2012.

The Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 makes it an offence to pay cash for scrap metal (there are no exemptions) and will require that all sellers of metal must provide verifiable ID at the point of sale with dealers required to record and retain records of each purchase.

It is anticipated that the introduction of these requirements will achieve notable reductions in the theft of metals.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That the Panel considers the work being undertaken to combat the reported incidents of vehicle crime and metal theft and highlight any additional activity that would be of benefit to the community; and

7.2 That Panel members consider the communications tools used and the awareness raising messages, and nominate any additional activities that the Council can assist with.

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Background Information:
None