

WHAT IS IT?

COPS is the practical application of crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) - the research school which argues that the design and the management of the urban environment can influence crime and anti social behaviour.

It was originally created by police officers in London and then refined into a 'toolkit' by a European funded project which pooled the knowledge and experience of many experts of CPTED in a range of European countries.¹

By definition, COPS is:

"A systematic and detailed study of a street and the building interfaces."

In practice, it identifies a whole raft of environmental features that offer actual or potential opportunities to commit crime, or generate the fear of crime, and also features that provide sites for drug taking and dealing and other anti social behaviour (ASB). The procedure involves a detailed survey of the area undertaken by an expert taking a visual audit of any problems identified. The results provide:

- A complete and detailed record of actual and potential crime generators present in each street

- An initial recommendation for action for each problem
- The identification of who or what organisation will work towards a solution
- A record of actions carried out and their effects.

The method can be used as a standalone process but is most effective when part of a partnership strategy. For example, it can be used alongside police enforcement and actions by the local council and health authority as part of an overall plan to deal with a major problem of drug dealing and drug use in public streets.

WHAT'S IT BASED ON?

The process is based on a range of well tested crime prevention principles. It is perhaps worth looking briefly at these, because they very much guide practice and they are not difficult to explain or to understand.

Routine Activities

'Routine activity theory' suggests that for a crime to take place, three elements must be present:

- A motivated offender.
- A suitable victim.
- The absence of a 'capable guardian'.²

More recent work, some by our own staff, has noted that that, in addition to motivation, offenders also need to 'resources to be successful, and of course there needs to be a law that they must contravene.

Defensible Space

In the context of COPS, 'defensible space', 'territorial influence' or 'territoriality' are terms used to indicate situations where the occupiers of space extend their influence from their totally private space outwards into the public domain, or in some cases vice versa. There is a lot of value in 'surveillance' in helping to prevent crime.

Crime Decline Cycles

Where streets and other environments are allowed to become dirty and poorly maintained – indicated for example by an abundance of litter and extensive graffiti – it gives rise to the perception that no one really cares about this area, and as a consequence anti-social behaviour becomes acceptable. This is sometimes

CRIME OPPORTUNITY PROFILING OF STREETS

(COPS)
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known as the 'broken windows' syndrome, that is if windows are not repaired more get broken and sets in motion a cycle of decline.



An example of how a COPS analysis brings together all of these ideas can be illustrated in how an illegal drugs market was tackled. Here the COPS system would identify those features within the built environment that offer opportunities for both the drug seller and the buyer. These are:

- To conduct their business out of sight of any 'capable guardians'.
- In places over which they could exercise 'territorial influence' to the disadvantage of ordinary users of the space.
- In places where no one is likely to take very much interest in what is happening.
- In places to which legitimate members of the public would be unwilling to go if they didn't have to. Those that have no choice in visiting such areas are less likely to intervene, even if they do see something illegal going on. In effect, such people would not be acting as capable guardians.

Having identified those elements, situational, environmental and social, that help to create the conditions for an illegal

drugs market, a COPS analysis would then go on to suggest a range of practical measures to reduce or prevent the harm caused by it. A COPS analysis is a holistic tool concerned with both the causes and the symptoms of crime and disorder. In particular, it is concerned with the 'climate' in which crime and disorder are likely to flourish, and by influencing this as well as concentrating on the actual offences themselves, it is suggested that even the worst environments can be turned around.

What kind of crimes can COPS impact upon?

As this methodology is a tool used primarily in the street it is unsurprising then that its biggest impact is on street related crime. The survey focuses upon a number of common aids to crime and anti-social behaviour found in the urban street. These include recessed doorways in which all types of crime and anti-social behaviour takes place, misused street furniture, such as benches and bus shelters, canvases for graffiti, poor street alighting, under-used alleyways and unrestricted access to the rear yards and elevations of offices and shops.

These are a few examples of crimes and nuisance behaviour it has helped reduce.

- Drug Dealing
- Drug Taking
- Theft Person
- Robbery
- Begging
- Fly Posting
- Littering
- Footway Obstruction
- Graffiti/Criminal Damage

- Rough Sleeping
- Loitering for illicit purposes
- Burglary

A TYPICAL COPS PROCESS

The COPS process will include a number of stages which can only be discussed in a very brief summary form here. An initial data gathering exercise involves an analysis of any available quantitative and qualitative crime data to identify specific crime hotspots and a general picture of crime and general ASB. This is then followed by an initial walkabout of the area with the local beat police officer and members of the local business and resident community to explore their views.

Having established a background context each street identified as having problems is surveyed. All actual and potential opportunities for crime and ASB in the street and the related building interfaces are recorded.

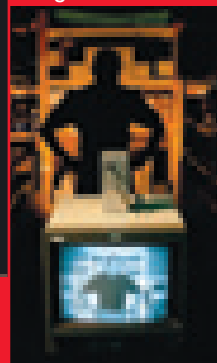
Then recommendations are made to solve those problems. There are CPTED/COPS solutions for problems associated with the following:

- Recessed doorways
- Porticos
- Basement light wells
- Public and private car parks
- Toilets and street urination
- Fly posting and stickers
- Graffiti
- Alleyways
- Building site hoardings
- Shop windows
- Automatic telling machines.
- Parks and gardens
- Refuse collection
- Public seating
- Informal seating
- Monuments

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- Lamp posts and sign posts
- Bus shelters
- Bollards
- Telephone kiosks
- Cycle racks
- Street litter bins
- Free newspaper containers
- Plant containers
- Royal Mail letter boxes



A TYPICAL CPTED SOLUTION – BASEMENT LIGHT WELLS

A COPS survey often identifies light wells as issues. These are very common features to the front of terraced buildings in Central London and other inner cities and they invariably contain staircases leading from emergency escape doors up to the street level. Because many of the light well steps are used for emergency escape the gates at street level are left unlocked during the day or at all times when the building is occupied.

Drug users find these places attractive because of the shelter and the privacy that some of them offer. Here is an example.

Some light wells contain air conditioning equipment and warm air outlets that provide a warm place to shelter in the winter and at night. In the inner cities they are unfortunately used as dustbins and it is not uncommon to find some that are filled with discarded

rubbish. This creates a fire risk; a potential home for vermin. The light wells also sometimes provide access to the building for burglars.

This problem has caused some building owners and managers to take draconian actions such as locking the gates, which, of course, may be contrary to the means of the emergency escape requirements for the building.

There are several methods to secure light wells against the drug user and other trespasser and most often they will require the permission from the appropriate authorities.³

Locking the Gate

The simplest method of preventing intruders gaining access into a light well, which has an emergency escape stair, is to lock the gate at the top. This will be reasonably effective if the railings and gate are of a climb resistant design. The problem with this solution is that if the gate lies at the top of an emergency escape staircase it can only be locked when the building is unoccupied.

Therefore this method can normally only be used at night and it will be necessary to ensure that a management system is in place to ensure that the gate is unlocked first thing in the morning. As is often the case, getting systems is one thing, making them work, quite another.

Building a Cage

Some building managers or owners have built a cage over the top of the steps and exit gate in order that the locking bolt on the gate is protected and that climbing over the railing into the well is prevented. Where such structures have gone into place, they have tended to be at the back or the side of a building. Large cage structures to the front of a building, especially in a

conservation area, are seldom allowed by the local authority planners. In the following picture, the shopkeeper has made use of the existing railing and simply added a hinged lid. At close of business, when the steps up from the basement cease to be a means of escape the shopkeeper simply closes over the lid and engages the padlock.



Grilling

Installing a grille over the top of a light well, at footway level, which takes account of the need to use an emergency route staircase, is probably the most effective way of dealing with this problem so long as sufficient light can still penetrate the basement areas of the building. The pictures below show such an installation, which includes a hinged, gridded lid over the emergency exit steps. The hinged portion of the grille is operated from the bottom of the steps via a simple lever, which is pushed or pulled by the person coming up the steps.

The advantage of this system is that in many cases it can be installed at the front of a building in a conservation area (as the following example shows) as it is not visually impairing to the building or street scene. In addition to this, most of the discarded rubbish can be collected from the top of the grille via the gate.

SUMMARY

Work such as this is being undertaken by



myself and colleagues here at PRCi as we try to influence safety and security in communities. This is a new method which can easily be adapted for use anywhere in the world.

To summarise therefore a COPS report suggests realistic solutions, but ones that are based on evidence. The strength of COPS is that it is:

- Simple.
- Practical.

- Catalyses strong working relationships with a wide range of partners.
- Provides easily measurable performance targets and outcomes.

Finally it might be thought that untrained personnel could easily undertake the COPS approach but caution is necessary as CPTED experts can:

- Identify crime & ASB others would miss
- Identify future opportunities for crime
- Know what solutions to recommend
- Know how and who to target to implement solutions

An example of inexpert solutions the figure shows an example of a shop keeper using broken glass to protect his premises but creating a significant danger to the public.

And this community solution to prevent ASB might be difficult to police.

Author Details

Dr Tim Pascoe is currently the Head of Business Development at PRCi a leading crime, security and risk consultancy in the UK. He has been an active researcher for over 20 years and is currently the chair of the UK Design Out Crime Association (DOCA) and an International Director of the International CPTED Association (ICA). He regularly publishes and presents internationally.

(t.pascoe@perpetuitygroup.com, +44 116 222 555).

1 The author of this report chaired that study.

2 At its simplest, a 'capable guardian' is someone who on a balance of probabilities will take some form of preventive action if they see a crime or offence taking place.

3 In the United Kingdom this would include the Building Control Officer and or the Fire Safety Officer. Planning permission may also be required.

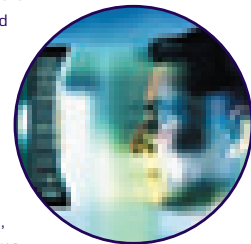


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