

# Researchers explore alternatives to reducing crime at high-crime locations

May 9 2012, by Dawn Fuller

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The bar with the regularly flashing police lights in its parking lot. The apartment building that's frequently featured on the news because of numerous crime investigations. A new essay suggests an alternative approach to reducing crime in such places, by placing regulations on places where crime is highly concentrated. Authors John Eck, a professor of criminal justice at the University of Cincinnati, and his daughter, Emily Eck, a researcher at Dalhousie University, are featured this month in the journal, *Criminology and Public Policy*.

The authors point out that frequent [crime](#) incidents are typically concentrated in relatively few places. Property owners who take measures to prevent crime (better lighting and leases, for example) can also reduce crime at those locations, as well as places nearby. Too many times, the problems are exacerbated because a very few property owners take too little responsibility for the property, resulting in frequent calls to police for assistance. This increases the costs of crime to all taxpayers. The authors suggest that crime from these places is a form of pollution.

“Regulatory options may increase local governments’ effectiveness at reducing crime while reducing government costs,” write the authors. “This is because regulatory approaches have the potential to shift some portion of the financial burden of crime fighting to owners of criminogenic locations.”

The essay proposes reducing crime pollution by taking a regulatory approach using the tools that governments use to curb industrial

pollution. Taxes, fines and fees could motivate property managers to take crime-control measures on their property, while subsidies, such as reduction in taxes, could reward them for their success.

The authors also suggest a “cap and trade” approach may work to reduce crime in these high-incidence pockets by placing caps on calls for police assistance. The local government sets a cap on certain high-volume crimes and property owners get permits up to the cap. Property owners could also trade and sell permits – an idea the U.S. uses to reduce sulfur dioxide emissions. The essay cites an example with parking lots, in which caps are set on reducing vehicle crimes. Property owners are provided permits that equal the cap and face serious fines if crimes exceed their permits.

“The city allows [parking lot](#) owners to sell their permits,” states the essay. “Lots A and B are below their allocation of thefts and have their permits to sell. Lot D is far over its limit and lot C is at its limit. If either C or D have low marginal abatement costs, they will probably reduce crime. If their marginal abatement cost is greater than the market price of additional permits, then they will buy the permits. The owners of A and B get rewarded for keeping crime low. If they can reduce their crimes even more, they may even make more money from selling additional permits. Thus, the market rewards prevention and penalizes crime production while addressing the marginal abatement cost problem,” the authors explain.

“We’re looking at an opportunity for local governments to shift the cost of crime from the taxpayer onto the few places that are causing most of the problems,” says John Eck. “There are enough examples to suggest it’s feasible and reasonable.

“Most crimes take place because of opportunity. This is an idea on how to block the opportunity to keep crime from happening,” says Eck.

“Rather than viewing crime as simply a matter between offenders and police,” conclude the authors, “a place focus requires consideration of the morality of crime facilitation by third parties. The immediate question is more likely to be who should pay for crime reduction, rather than whether regulation is technically feasible.”

Provided by University of Cincinnati

Citation: Researchers explore alternatives to reducing crime at high-crime locations (2012, May 9) retrieved 16 June 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-05-explore-alternatives-crime-high-crime.html>

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