

Police: Burglary, theft numbers down in Melbourne

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During the weekly data-driven approaches to crime and traffic safety, or DDACTS, briefing at the Melbourne Police Department, patrol lieutenants and sergeants, detectives, commanders and crime analysts take turns firing off things that they've learned on the streets.

"Last night on Clover Circle, we had a suspicious person again," a lieutenant said.

"Ferguson stopped a guy walking down the street with an edger," a sergeant said.

"He may be correlated with the one on Zephyr where the ex-Marine shot at him," another lieutenant said.

The reports weave together a picture of recent crime trends or spikes in violence in Melbourne. They narrow it down to when and where.

Melbourne police call them "hot zones."

"Through the intelligence-led policing, we have suspects, vehicles and areas we want to patrol for," patrol Sgt. Brian Hart said. "So now we're going to go out and target that area."

FLORIDA TODAY news partner News 6 rode along with Hart as he patrolled the Wickham Park area of Melbourne.

"So this area is a high vehicle and structure burglary area," Hart said. "We're looking for anything that appears suspicious, people out of place, things out of place. One of our night shift guys stopped an older male and he was confronted by a homeowner in this region right here."

Hart said targeting hot zones places officers in the areas where crime is spiking.

"We found that if you put a number of marked police cars in an area, criminals are less likely to commit crime," Hart said. "They don't want to be where the police are at."

Targeting those areas is essential, police said.

"If we put cops out and allow them to roam without a specific mission, we may be in the wrong place at the wrong time," Hart said. "We want to be in the right place at the right time, which is where all of this data is coming into play."

Within minutes of News 6's ride-along Hart spotted a man on a bike with a beach bag so large that it was almost banging into the bicycle tires as the man pedaled. The bag showed the outline of a big box.

Hart made a U-turn and stopped the man after he crossed Wickham Road in the middle of a block.

"You have to be in a crosswalk or crossing at a 90-degree angle," Hart told the man. "What's in the bag?"

The man told Hart that he was carrying a gift for his friend.

"It's not even open, it's a Crock-Pot," the man said. "I'm returning it to my buddies."

Hart was not convinced, especially after the man revealed his criminal record and said he spent time in prison. But, as Hart correctly noted, "carrying a Crock-Pot on a bike is not illegal," so he allowed the man to leave after taking note of his name and address.

Hart said he would share his encounter in the next DDACTS briefing and include the Crock-Pot in the department's database if a homeowner reports one stolen.

Melbourne police Cmdr. Sean Riordan said DDACTS enables the department to get results on crime by shortening crime trends when they notice a spike.

In the one year that DDACTS has been in effect, police said vehicle and home burglaries, along with auto thefts and shoplifting, are down.

Riordan said DDACTS also ensures accountability.

Every 30 days, patrol leaders must report what they did, how it worked and what they plan to do for the next 30 days. If their approach didn't work, they must present a new plan and learn from others in the DDACTS briefings.