Online Crime Reporting System

Darin Farber

Abstract

In 2007, law enforcement agencies face difficult financial times. Many agencies are forced to cut their budgets with talks of property tax reforms, military call-ups, hiring freezes, and significant loss of officers through attrition (Smith, 2005). These cutbacks have challenged police administrators to seek alternative measures to save money yet provide the same quality services the public has come to expect from law enforcement. Online crime reporting is one solution which allows citizens to self-report certain crimes through the Internet, allowing officers to patrol "hot spots" and remain available for in-progress violent crimes (Bohan, 2006). The implementation process will be determined by citizen surveys and personal interviews with law enforcement agencies that currently have an online crime reporting system in place. The selection process will involve visual demonstrations with software companies who offer the technology to enable citizens to submit an online report directly to the police department.

Introduction

In 2007, Chief Robert C. Merchant, Jr. announced his annual top ten work priorities list. The list had an array of projects all sharing a common goal of improving efficiency and customer service which ultimately would lead to a better quality of life for residents, businesses, and visitors within the City of Altamonte Springs. While reading over the list one particular project jumped out as one which would benefit both the community and police officers – "Investigate the Feasibility of Creating an Online Crime Reporting System."

The Altamonte Springs Police Department constantly strives to carry out its mission statement which reads, "The Altamonte Springs Police Department is committed to excellence in service through community involvement. Together, our partnership will develop a sense of community pride and an atmosphere intolerant of criminal activity" (Altamonte Springs Police Department website, n.d.). Chief Merchant and his command staff are continuously in search of means to improve upon efficient customer service and enhance the quality of life of our community. After all, the cliché, "I pay your salary" is true, and our department truly believes in community oriented policing which focuses on listening to one's needs rather than telling or guessing of their needs.

Online crime reporting has the same mission. Its goal is to get relevant information pertaining to a crime to the police department expeditiously through the Internet creating convenience for the victim yet maintaining security for sensitive information. This research paper will explore both positive and negative validation for

implementing an online crime reporting system into an existing law enforcement agency as a resource to deter crime.

Literature Review

In researching an online crime reporting system this writer discovered it is a product whose mission parallels the same philosophy as the police department's values and mission statement. These systems aim to offer high levels of customer service to encourage more community participation in self-reporting crimes. In return the police department receives a more accurate snapshot of exactly how many and what type of crimes are occurring in which districts. Equipped with accurate information and more often detailed data such as: time frames, specific days of the week the crimes have occurred on, the police department can analyze this data to narrow down when the crimes are most likely to occur. Armed with this valuable information undercover officers hit the streets to conduct surveillance operations during those data driven time frames.

There is no denying we live in the age of technology. To turn our backs on the worldly innovations of mankind is an injustice to the public for whom we (law enforcement) are sworn to serve and protect! Technology is the ticket to the future, and those standing without a ticket must be prepared to survive in a world where computers will one day control everything from our televisions to our toothbrushes.

An online crime reporting system is a prime example of modern day technology designed to make the world a superior place to live. When used properly this technology will not only enhance a human's environment when it comes to convenience, but will also significantly enhance the safety of our community at a reasonable expense. An online system affords police officers the opportunity to patrol "hot spots" and remain available to quickly respond to violent crimes. This is accomplished by allowing citizens to self-report non-violent minor crimes with no suspect information. Of course like anything in life a good situation always has the potential for a negative to make its way in. In this case the negative being the potential of false reports made through the online system. One strategy to combat this negative includes posting an eye-catching warning on the Internet site of the penalties a person may face for making a false police report (Bohan, 2006). In addition, software is available to lock out Internet provider addresses from those individuals who knowingly choose to misuse the system through false reports or who attempt to flood the system with multiple invalid entries (Welcome to coplogic, 2007).

In contrast one element in support of this technological advancement derives from crime analysis, which clearly indicates that the number of calls for service and crimes reported has steadily increased year after year. These statistical studies validate the imminent necessity to hire additional police officers to keep our streets safe. But where does law enforcement get the funds? In 2007, law enforcement agencies face difficult financial times. Many agencies are forced to cut their budgets with talks of property tax reforms, military call-ups, hiring freezes, and significant loss of officers through attrition. These cutbacks have challenged police administrators to examine

alternative measures to save money yet provide the same quality services the public has come to expect from law enforcement.

An online crime reporting system is a more affordable alternative to hiring additional police officers to respond to increased call volumes. For example, it costs an average of $64.00 an hour for a police officer to take an on-scene report. The average costs for a telephone transcription service is $36.00 an hour. Whereas, the average costs of emailing a report through an online crime reporting system is pennies (Geiger, 2004)! Added benefits include: (1) offsets the workload demands of both sworn police officers and community service officers who are required to write reports; (2) allows citizens to report certain non-violent crimes, with no suspect information, at their convenience (24/7) from the computer location of their choice without having to wait on the response time of law enforcement; (3) provides citizens with an emailed copy of their report eliminating the extra step and expense of driving to the police department and paying for a hard copy (Johnson, 2006); (4) provides an outlet to piggyback other services on the system such as: paying a parking ticket, requesting a vacation house check, completing a business emergency contact form, registering for Neighborhood/Business Watch program, signing up for volunteer opportunities, etc (Schroeder, 2004); and (5) the system may be compatible with surrounding law enforcement agencies allowing for information sharing such as: collecting statistical data to develop crime patterns in a specific geographical area, which ultimately could lead to the arrest of a suspect.

National statistics on crime show a difference on the number of actual crimes committed as opposed to the number of crimes reported to law enforcement. In 2003, the Federal Bureau of Investigation reported that 10.3 million property crimes and 1.38 million violent crimes were committed. However, the Department of Justice reported in the same year only half of all violent crimes committed and a third of all property crimes were actually reported to the police. There are several reasons crimes may go unreported including: fear of repercussions; embarrassment or shame; assumption that the crime is too insignificant to warrant reporting; or a belief that reporting the crime will make no difference. Perhaps the single most significant factor in determining whether or not to report a crime is the convenience aspect to reach police (Garrett, Iriberri & Leroy, 2006). An online crime reporting system offers victims this convenience and may be the solution to bring into balance the number of crimes committed versus the number of crimes reported.

Millions of Americans place their trust in the Internet on a daily basis to retrieve information on everything from life saving medical advice to best traveled vacation destinations. The Internet has also become quite popular among shopping enthusiasts - so much in fact it has gained the confidence of consumers to enter personal information including their home address, phone number, and credit card information. So the question arises – are citizens of Altamonte Springs ready to trust the Internet to police their community? Let's take a look at our methods section where a random survey was compiled to find the answer to this question.

Methods

The purpose of this research is to explore the applications of an online crime reporting system to determine if its benefits outweigh any existing negatives. In the interest of ethics, fairness, and governmental responsibility the research sought out the input of residents and businesses whose tax dollars will fund the implementation of an online crime reporting system.

To determine how well an online crime reporting system will be perceived in the community of Altamonte Springs, a survey was emailed to two target groups. The first group was composed of one-hundred and fifty homeowners selected randomly from a registered list of Neighborhood Watch participants. The second group was composed of one-hundred and fifty business owners selected randomly from a registered list of Business Watch participants.

In addition to the survey, telephone interviews were conducted with the Melbourne, Florida Police Department; Orange County, Florida Sheriff's Office; Boise, Idaho Police Department and the San Jose, California Police Department. These agencies currently operate with an online crime reporting system in place. The agency interviews provided factual information about online crime reporting systems. Agencies shared their experiences of the implementation and selection process, and the advantages and disadvantages of incorporating a system as an option for reporting a crime. Thirdly, a visual demonstration was scheduled with the software company CopLogic who provides the technology enabling citizens to submit an online report directly to the police department. This provided an opportunity to view an online crime reporting system firsthand and ask the actual vendor questions about the program.

The survey consisted of twenty questions designed to solicit the community's opinion on whether or not the City of Altamonte Springs should invest tax payer's dollars into an online crime reporting system. Two of the questions compared the level of trust citizens have in transferring their personal information through the Internet in general, compared with sharing their personal information through the Internet specifically with their local police department.

In question six participants were asked, "Have you ever been a victim of a minor crime and decided not to report the crime?" Question seven followed up with, "If you answered yes to question six, was waiting for a police officer to respond a factor in not reporting the crime?" Question eight asked, "Did you feel the matter was too trivial to report to the police?" And question nine concluded the series with, "Would it make you more likely to report a minor crime if you could self-report it online from your home or business?" These four questions gave an indication for the need and support of an online crime reporting system from the community.

Two of the survey questions asked: "if given the option to self-report a crime online or have an officer respond to take the report which option would you choose?" The first crime choice was a stolen cell phone where participants are asked to choose whether they would report it online or rather have an officer respond to take the report. The second crime choice posed to participants was a vandalized mailbox. These two questions were designed to measure the results on which crime was chosen more to be self-reported, and to examine the thought processes as to why one was chosen over the other.

The last question of the survey directly asked the participant for their feedback on pros or cons they may perceive on utilizing an online crime reporting system.

Results

A survey was emailed to one-hundred and fifty Neighborhood Watch participants and one-hundred and fifty Business Watch participants for a total of three-hundred surveys sent out (See Appendix A). Sixty-three responses were received back for a return rate of 21%. The survey return method was combined between the two target groups and individual response rates between each group were not determined.

The goal of the survey was to determine the amount of support the community would offer towards implementing an online crime reporting system.   Question seventeen through nineteen asked the community if they would support an online crime reporting system using slight differences in the wording between each question. Question nineteen of the survey directly asks, "Would you support your tax dollars being spent on a system which allowed citizens the choice to go online and self-report crimes; therefore allowing police officers to patrol neighborhoods and businesses for criminal activity and remain available to respond to 9-1-1 emergency calls for service?"   The response to this question yielded:

YES	78.3%
NO	5%
UNDECIDED	16.7%

Question seventeen solicits the same information but poses the question differently leaving out the words "your tax dollars" by asking, "Do you personally believe online crime reporting sounds like a convenient option for reporting crimes to police and should be offered to the customers of the City of Altamonte Springs?" The response to this question received:

YES	72.1%	7.9% less in favor of online reporting
NO	3.3%	34% fewer against online crime reporting
UNDECIDED	24.6%	47% increase compared to question 19

Question eighteen wanted to know if the participant thought online crime reporting was not right for them, but thought it sounded like a convenient option for some people and should be offered as an option to report a crime. The results came back with:

YES	61%
NO	5.1%
UNDECIDED	15.3%
N/A	18.6%

In question ten, participants are asked, "Which manner would you find it more convenient to report a crime?" The choices are: a) through a computer; b) via phone with an officer dispatched to your home or office; or c) driving to the police department to report the crime. The results were:

COMPUTER	62.3%
OFFICER DISPATCHED	36.1%
DRIVING TO THE P.D.	1.6%

Question eleven advertised one of the benefits of online crime reporting which provides victims the option to self-print a copy of the report from the convenience of their home or office. The question wanted to know how useful this option was to the community. The information gathered stated:

VERY USEFUL	37.7%
USEFUL	37.7%
SOMEWHAT USEFUL	24.6%
NOT USEFUL AT ALL	0%

Another benefit of an online crime reporting system is the ability to offer the system in multiple languages. Question twelve wanted to find out how useful it would be to report a crime in one's native language. The results were:

VERY USEFUL	58.3%
USEFUL	33.3%
SOMEWHAT USEFUL	5%
NOT USEFUL AT ALL	3.3%

In question thirteen participants were asked to state their native language which yielded the following responses:

ENGLISH	88.5%
SPANISH	3.3%
OTHER	8.2%

Participants who chose other were asked to list their native language and their responses included: one response each for Portuguese, Vietnamese, and Indonesian; and two responses for Russian.

In questions four and five a participant's level of confidence in technology to protect their personal information transferred through the Internet was measured. The results came back with:

NO CONFIDENCE	11.3%
SOMEWHAT CONFIDENT	51.6%
VERY CONFIDENT	29%
VERY MUCH CONFIDENT	8.1%

Then question five wanted to know how confident participants were in transferring personal information to the *police department* through the Internet. The survey tally showed:

NO CONFIDENCE	9.7%	14% less participants than question 4
SOMEWHAT CONFIDENT	54.8%	6% more than question 4
VERY CONFIDENT	29%	Same percentage as question 4
VERY MUCH CONFIDENT	6.5%	19.7% decrease than question 4

Another big benefit of an online crime reporting system is the convenience for the victim to choose the exact time of the day to report the crime. Questions six and seven wanted to find out if a participant had ever been the victim of a minor crime and chose not to report it due to the inconvenience of having to wait for an officer to respond out to take the report. The results came back at:

YES – DUE TO INCONVENIENCE OF RESPONSE TIME	18.6%
NO – NOT THE REASON TO NOT REPORT THE CRIME	23.7%

Question eight wanted to know if participants felt the situation was too trivial to report it to the police. The results came back at:

YES	28.8%
NO	11.9%

Question nine was asked to determine if a victim would be more willing to self-report the crime if the option of online reporting was available regardless of how trivial they felt the crime was. The results were:

YES, I'D BE MORE WILLING	68.9%
NO, IT WOULD NOT MAKE A DIFFERENCE	9.8%

Questions fourteen through sixteen were designed to measure the level of support for online crime reporting based on the type of crime. The first crime to decide on was the report of a stolen cell phone. This choice received:

YES, I WOULD SELF-REPORT THIS CRIME	91.7%
NO, I WOULD PREFER AN OFFICER DISPATCHED	8.3%

The second crime posed to participants was a vandalized mailbox. This choice received:

YES, I WOULD SELF-REPORT THIS CRIME	73.8%
NO, I WOULD PREFER AN OFFICER DISPATCHED	26.2%

Question sixteen measured participants' opinion on whether self-reporting would have an affect on identifying a suspect in a crime vs. the traditional method of calling police officers out to the scene. The results were:

NO DIFFERENCE IN IDENTIFYING A SUSPECT	45%
SOME DIFFERENCE IN IDENTIFYING A SUSPECT	46.7%
SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN IDENTIFYING A SUSPECT	8.3%

The final question of the survey allowed participants to offer their thoughts and opinions on implementing an online crime reporting system. Twenty-two participants responded with the following input:

1.) I think speaking with a police officer would definitely help identify the suspect better because they can ask questions, etc. to help you remember more detail.

2.) I think that if this system allows for police men/women to be out on the streets more and allows for better communication between police members than I am all for it but if this system is meant to cut down on the number of police officers needed then you don't have my support.

3.) If my tax dollars are taken away from "live" police at a scene vs. online reporting, I am totally AGAINST it. I feel the best deterrent to crime is to see a police person (who is armed and ready to defend the citizenry) vs. phone.

4.) I suggest you launch a pilot project before making this an ASPD funded program. I believe it needs to be tested in the market, before we use Tax money to fund it. Alicia Ramirez 741 Little Wekiva Cr. Altamonte Springs, FL 32714

5.) I think that it would be great to have an alternative for reporting minor crimes without taking an officer off the street. That is why I would not report a minor crime otherwise, because I don't think it warrants an officer's direct time.

6.) I am not familiar with online crime reporting systems. If this would allow officers to stay out on patrol instead of being tied up with paperwork for minor crimes then I am all for it. My question would be how does the individual decide what is "minor"?

7.) I think when any crime is committed on any level you have a victim, and sometimes speaking with law enforcement is a form of therapy for the victim to get past and hopefully resolve whatever has happened to them. The computer is so impersonal and on the other hand I think you would be inviting the reporting of too many fictitious crimes.

8.) I believe if a person wanted to speak to an officer that would be their right. Not like Orange County where it was decided an elderly woman's purse being stolen was not important enough to send an officer. Do not force someone to use the Internet for reporting a crime. Not everyone uses the Internet and feels safer calling an officer.

9.) My concern would be that people might report false claims over the Internet for self-gain (insurance) or revenge (neighbor disputes, domestic). When an officer is present they have the training to determine the motive of the victim as well as seeing first hand any evidence necessary in determining a crime. As far as reporting a crime over the Internet and remaining anonymous if desired, I would not believe I would be protected from anonymity.

10.) On-line reporting should be specifically directed to the lesser offenses.

11.) I think self reporting online would depend on the severity of the crime. I think that perhaps citizens should first report the crime via telephone and then be directed to either online or in person contact with the department.

12.) My concern is that the system would have to be equipped with detailed questions so that the right information is given, whereas a police officer would know what to ask and if the victim told them incorrectly, could ask them again with more specifics.

13.) I think reporting crimes online would be good in some situations, sometimes dealing with certain police officers are difficult especially when the officer doesn't like you or harasses you. This way you don't need to feel uncomfortable reporting a crime.

14.) Here's my thought. We've got way too many dispatchers (and I have family in law enforcement so hear me out) who are lazy and will tell someone to "report it online" rather than take the time and EVALUATE if it's minor enough to report online or if an officer is really needed. Trust me, if it seems like laziness takes over, I will definitely make my opinions known. Altamonte is a much better PD than Orlando, in my opinion and don't even get me started on the laziness of the sheriffs in Orange County who I dealt with first hand. Thank you.

15.) Online reporting is the way of the future!

16.) While we report crimes online to allow police officers to patrol our neighborhoods, I hope they just don't sit on a corner of our City citing speeders. I understand this is criminal activity, but it is not as important as robberies and assaults. The criminal activity in our City has grown faster than the population. Respectfully, Gloria Ortiz

17.) I would have a concern regarding how I would know what the status of my case is; what's been done, if the police department is even doing anything, etc. I think this would be the big drawback of this program, in that citizens want to know what's being done, and if they just receive an auto-response, rather than a personal visit, they're not going to think it's worth even reporting.

18.) My only concern would be that the ease of this system will increase the overall

number of crimes reported, and matters that were trivial or minor enough not to warrant a phone call to the police in the past will now flood the system. I would imagine a robust system would also have a way to filter the incoming reports, but I would definitely take the time to visit other cities that have implemented a similar product to see what affects it has had, positive and negative.

19.) I would like to think that an online report would involve some personal follow-up -- a phone call -- or a non-form e-mail, or a visit depending on the crime reported .

20.) The only downside is that many people cannot write well enough to describe completely the event. Also, this may trigger a huge increase in the reporting of every minor crimes and trivial events and therefore make life for the authorities more complicated rather than easier.

21.) I think this is a good idea for minor crimes however you are opening the door for those who have nothing to do and want to complain about everything. If you have to respond to all written complaints it could take more time then having an officer respond.

22.) I like the idea of online reporting, but with one caveat -- we need to know these reports are going somewhere and being handled by someone, and aren't just going off into no-man's land. While we realize that some crimes of the nature described above are non-violent and the police already have their hands full with violent crime, if this online reporting tool is offered, people are going to use it....and we are going to expect to hear back from the police in some manner. This is a great idea and I commend the City for taking advantage of technology.

      Telephone interviews were conducted with four law enforcement agencies that currently utilize an online crime reporting system. The first interview was conducted with Mr. Ron Ward of the Melbourne, Florida Police Department. Mr. Ward advised their agency was one of the pioneers in implementing online crime reporting which has been in use for over five years. Melbourne Police Department utilizes a system which was created in-house by Information System's employees. Therefore, there were no outside costs associated with the implementation and monthly use of their system.

      Mr. Ward advised the system is not used very frequently; in fact their agency will typically only receive four or five reports each month. He did advise the system has been beneficial to tourists who either wait to report a crime or don't discover they have been a victim until they arrive back home - sometimes in another country. The system allows tourists to easily report the crime from the ease of their computer in lieu of traveling hundreds of miles back to Melbourne, Florida.

      The standard operating procedure for reviewing reports is the responsibility of Community Service Officers. These are police officers assigned to community relations. The drawback of Melbourne's system is the inability to be tied directly into the current agencies Records Management System database enabling pre-formatted reports to be easily printed. Instead their system requires personnel to re-enter information to create a report. There has been only one incident of false reporting involving an ex-boyfriend falsely making reports against the ex-girlfriend. The suspect has been charged with

making false reports and the case is currently being reviewed by the State Attorney's Office.

Melbourne's system allows citizens two means to file a report. The first method is to complete a series of fill in boxes and submit the report directly through the Internet. The second method is to print out and complete a blank pre-formatted report (requiring Adobe Acrobat) and either fax or mail the report into the police department. (Appendix C). Mr. Ward advised their policy allows victims to report most crimes including vehicle burglaries in which there is no suspect information. The website refers citizens to call the Communications Center before making a report to determine if the crime meets the criteria to report it online. The Communications Center determines if there are any suspects or evidence to collect. In the event the victim has suspect information, the call does not qualify for online crime reporting. If only evidence needs to be collected, an officer is dispatched solely to retrieve the evidence and the report may be made through the Internet.

Next, I spoke with Sergeant Bill Vandewater of the Orange County, Florida Sheriff's Office. Sgt. Vandewater advised O.C.S.O. has used online crime reporting for just over a year. There have been no false reports to this date, and the system receives an average of 800 reports each month. The system is operated on software provided by a company called CopLogic, Inc. The standard operating procedure for reviewing reports is handled by officers assigned to light duty. A report is reviewed within 48 hours of submittal. A prime benefit of CopLogic's software is the ability to interface with the agencies current Records Management System, therefore, eliminating the requirement to retype the reported crime. The system has been quite advantageous to public safety in Orange County, Florida by keeping deputies in service to respond to higher priority type calls. The system has also been embraced by Walt Disney World who made up custom flyers to hand out to hotel guests advertising the program and providing the website to report incidents. The flyer provides the criteria to utilize the system and a phone number for any questions. The sheriff's office website (Appendix D) is very user friendly, clearly explaining how online crime reporting works and provides a list of frequently asked questions. The sheriff's office written policy/procedures has been attached as Appendix G. To help advertise the program and answer frequently asked questions to dispel any concerns, the sheriff's office created a tri-fold brochure which is disseminated to the community (Appendix H).

The third interview was with Ms. Deanna Lokker of the Boise, Idaho Police Department. Ms. Lokker advised her agency implemented online crime reporting in the year 2005. They purchased the software from CopLogic, Inc. for $14,000, and pay an additional $3,900 per year for support and maintenance of the program. Boise P.D. averages 90 calls a month reported through the online system. The reports are reviewed by two civilian employees. Ms. Lokker could not recall any incidents of false reports made through the system. She noted that the website warns that making false reports is a crime. (Appendix E). When asked about any disadvantages of using an online crime reporting system Ms Lokker responded,

> There are a couple of disadvantages to using on-line reporting: Changing the expectation of the public that they will be contacted and that we will conduct follow-up on their cases. First, getting people to use the on-line system has been a little slow. Citizens like speaking to a person when

they have a crime to report so getting them to use it more is our challenge. Secondly, typically, on-line cases don't have suspects and therefore not much chance to develop investigative leads. They receive an e-mail attached report so we don't routinely call them. A big advantage to having an on-line reporting system is that regardless of the number of reports received, it is that many fewer reports that need to be handled by officers or civilian staff. Also, we receive a generated report from Coplogic every month for statistics.

The last interview was conducted with Mr. Cecil Lawson of the San Jose, California Police Department. Mr. Lawson advised S.J.P.D. created an online crime reporting system in- house three years ago. Like other agency systems created in-house the main disadvantage is the inability to interface with RMS (Records Management System). Lawson advised they purchased a dedicated server from Microsoft SQL which costs $2,000. He further advised one other disadvantage of creating an in-house system is the initial time-consuming process to create the system and the maintenance of the system. S.J.P.D. is in the process of evaluating third party software companies whose technology is far superior, like CopLogic, to take over housing and serving the program.

S.J.P.D. utilizes supervisors in the Communications Center to review incoming online reports. They have received 55,000 reports over a 35 month time span which averages 1,571 reports received each month. Lawson was not aware of any false reports made through the system. Like most agencies the criteria to use the system involves reporting a minor crime with no suspect information. Victims may also report burglaries to vehicles and residential and commercial burglaries involving no forced entry. The system was not widely used at first, however, after an extensive media blitz the community quickly adopted the system as a convenient means to report certain crimes. S.J.P.D. has piggybacked accident reporting onto the system and plans to offer more services in the near future. (Appendix F).

Discussion

The results of the survey clearly indicate strong support of an online crime reporting system from the community of Altamonte Springs. Participants were questioned about their support in three questions each worded slightly different. The average number of participants who indicated they would support implementing this type of system was 76.6 percent. Only 7.8 percent of survey members responded against online crime reporting, while 18.8 percent responded "Undecided" at this time.

Recalling from the literature review, in 2003 the F.B.I. reported that 10.3 million property crimes and 1.38 million violent crimes were committed. However, the Department of Justice reported in the same year only half of all violent crimes committed and a third of all property crimes were actually reported to the police. There were several reasons crimes may go unreported but perhaps the single most significant factor in determining whether or not to report a crime is the convenience aspect to reach police (Garrett, et al., 2006). Question ten of the survey convincingly affirmed the community finds it most convenient to report a crime through means of the Internet with 62.3 percent. These findings contribute to the justification of implementing an online

crime reporting system. They also indicate online crime reporting may be the solution to bring into balance the number of crimes committed versus the number of crimes reported.

The survey continued to explore the "convenience factor" in deciding whether or not to report a crime in questions six through nine. Question six discovers 31.8 percent of survey members have been the victim of a minor crime but chose not to report it to police. Question seven verified the cause in not reporting for 18.6 percent of victims was the inconvenience of waiting on the response time of an officer. Question eight determined 28.8 percent of victims believed the situation too trivial to report. But what is really significant is identified in question nine where survey members report 68.9 percent would be more likely to report a crime if the option to self-report from the convenience of one's home or office was available.

One possible negative of online crime reporting which required examination was the indirect contact with a victim through the Internet to retrieve identification and events related to the crime itself. The fear was the insecurity the community may possess about transferring this sensitive information through the Internet. Questions four and five were designed to measure the communities' confidence in transferring information through the Internet. Question four of the survey confirmed the community has 88.7 percent of a degree of confidence in transferring personal information in general through the Internet such as: online banking, providing information related to a purchase, and other areas where personal information is divulged. Only 11.3 percent of those surveyed responded with no confidence at all. Question five then specifically asks, "How confident would you be in transferring personal information to the police department through the Internet?" The results came back with 90.3 percent of participants responding with some degree of confidence. Only 9.7 percent responded with no confidence - a decrease of 1.6 percent fewer members acknowledging no confidence compared to providing personal information wide-ranging through the Internet. These percentages point toward the confidence the community has in the police department to protect personal information when transferred through the Internet; therefore eliminating this concern and possible negative of online crime reporting.

Now that the communities' support of online crime reporting has been established, the survey focused in to analyze the degree of support depending on the type of crime committed. Questions fourteen and fifteen provided a comparison of support between a stolen cell phone versus a vandalized mailbox. Preconceived notions by this writer imagined the amount of support for utilizing self-reporting for a stolen cell phone would be high, while support would significantly drop off for actual damage to one's property. The survey results indicated otherwise. A stolen cell phone received 91.7 percent in favor of self-reporting the crime, compared with 73.8 percent in favor of self-reporting vandalism to their mailbox. With only 17.9 percent less in favor of self-reporting damage to their mailbox the majority of participants supported the use of an online system – putting to rest the doubts of support from this writer.

Question sixteen asked participants if they believed the opportunity to identify a suspect in damaging one's property would be jeopardized by choosing to self-report over an officer dispatched to the scene. The majority of participants, at 55 percent, believed self-reporting the crime would make a difference in identifying a suspect. However only 8.3 percent of survey members believed it would be a significant

difference compared with 46.7 percent who responded with somewhat of a difference. These numbers indicate further education is needed to explain how the police department intends to only allow use of online crime reporting in situations where there are no immediate leads for the responding officer to investigate. The public needs to be reassured that information reported through the Internet will be followed up by a detective as thoroughly and expeditiously as if the information was submitted first hand from an officer.

Few would argue that unreported crimes hinder law enforcement's efforts to extinguish the criminal element from society. It's the classic Broken Windows theory offered by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in 1982. The theory states if citizens ignore small issues such as broken windows, accumulated trash, junked or abandoned vehicles their avoidance will open the gate to more significant neighborhood issues including robbery, burglary, drug dealing, auto theft, and perhaps even rape! Consider a building with a few broken windows left unattended for a period of time. Eventually the criminal element will be drawn to this area and continue to destroy the rest of the windows. Next, the criminal element will elevate their illegal activities perhaps breaking into the building. The series of unreported events and failure of community recognition will continue down a path of destruction (Wikipedia, 2007).

A successful strategy to block this destruction and prevent the decay of neighborhoods and business districts is to fix problems when they are small and report all crimes to the police department. Citizens who do not report even the smallest of crimes end up unintentionally encouraging further criminal activity in the area. It is customary for most law enforcement agencies to meet monthly to review the prior month's crime activity. By studying where, when, how, and what type of crimes are being committed, law enforcement officials are able to identify patterns and trends to develop strategies to deter criminal activity in the current month. Crimes which go unreported and are not included in a monthly crime analysis report prevent law enforcement from obtaining an accurate depiction of crime in a particular district. This lack of knowledge causes a short fall of attention to an area that in actuality has more crime then police know about.

Online crime reporting seeks to eliminate the barriers which prevent citizens from reporting crimes. As previously mentioned the system creates a convenience factor to eliminate the wait time victims experience from an officer's delayed response. A second alternative to diminish unreported crimes is to offer victims the ability to report crimes in their native language. The number of immigrants living within the United States continues to grow each year. However what is most significant is the increased number choosing to settle down in suburbs, small towns, and rural areas bringing a variety of different languages. This creates a barrier for communication with law enforcement. Overcoming this barrier is essential to providing proper protection to the community. Citizens who cannot communicate effectively with law enforcement are less likely to report themselves as victims of a crime (Shah, 2007).

Perhaps Carl Peed, Director of the United States Department of Justice, stated it best when he said,

> At the core of community policing are partnerships and problem solving, but those essential elements can be hindered if law enforcement is not able to communicate with the growing diverse population in this country. Recognizing the need to improve communication and interaction with limited English proficient individuals is among the next steps in advancing community policing. By developing and implementing a language access plan, law enforcement agencies will be able to strengthen their police community relations, increase trust, and be better positioned to address public safety problems (Shah, 2007).

Most of us take it for granted that in an emergency, we can pick up the phone, call the police and help will soon be on the way. For the millions of victims who are limited-English proficient, accessing police services is not so easy. Language barriers prevent many residents from talking to or getting help from the police. Research indicates a majority of non-English speaking victims choose not to report a crime because of the language barrier (Hwang & Yasui, 2007). With the ability to communicate in six different languages at the press of a button, online crime reporting is the step in the right direction to bridging the gap between non-English speaking community members and law enforcement. In question thirteen participants were asked to state their native language. Responses confirmed Carl Peed's warning that a variety of languages exist within our communities. 11.5 percent of participants acknowledged their primary means of communication was a language other than English. These numbers are equivalent to 5,175 customers of Altamonte Springs who the majority of law enforcement would have a difficult time communicating with. This study also indicates the likelihood that over 5,000 members of our society would be less likely to report a crime face to face with police officers. Unless law enforcement addresses the issue by providing other means for these individuals to communicate criminal activity, the gap in communication will to continue to expand each year.

The final question to the survey allowed participants to voice additional opinions, comments, or concerns regarding online crime reporting. The majority of comments indicated strong support of the system if certain criteria were put in place. For example, one comment stated, "I think this is a good idea for minor crimes however you are opening the door for those who have nothing to do and want to complain about everything. If you have to respond to all written complaints it could take more time than having an officer respond." The survey did not go into detail on all of the features offered by existing systems on the market. Further education through Neighborhood and Business Watch meetings and potentially the media is necessary to provide more details on exactly how the system operates and certain functions the police have to deter false reports and misuse of the system. For example, the system offered through CopLogic provides the ability to lock out a single Internet provider address if the operator does not heed warnings of misuse (Welcome to coplogic, 2007). Perhaps one citizen summed it up best when he simply wrote, "Online reporting is the way of the future!"

There are two options available to acquire the software needed to offer online crime reporting. First, an agency can create the software in-house utilizing the

expertise of existing Information System employees. The main advantage is the cost savings associated with creating the software. By having in-house employees develop the software as a work assignment they are paid as part of their normal salary with no overhead costs. The downside is the time-consuming challenge of creating an effective reporting system would take existing employees away from current work assignments. This diversion could have ill side effects leading to poor internal customer service which ultimately could have a domino effect on customer service provided externally. Research has also shown the inability of current agencies to interface in-house created online reporting programs with their Records Management System. This leads to an inefficient process of having employees re-type online submitted reports into their R.M.S.

The second option available in bringing online crime reporting to an agency is to purchase the web based software from a private company. Currently CopLogic is the only private company who offers web based crime reporting software. The company has an outstanding reputation in the law enforcement community with agencies that have purchased their product. William Gitmed of CopLogic, Inc. had the following to say about the product his company offers,

> Coplogic's Desk Officer Online Reporting System allows residents and visitors using Internet technology to file their own minor incident reports. These types of reports now require an officer's time or even worse yet, do not ever get reported. The Desk Officer Online Reporting System allows agencies to designate as many incident types as they choose, including, but not limited to, Lost Property, Harassing Phone Calls, Thefts, Auto Burglaries where there is no evidence or known suspects, Roadway Complaints, Crime Tips, Pet Registration, House Watch Request Forms, and can even be used as an online 3-1-1 System! Some agencies are taking in an excess of 25% of all their reports online without having to dispatch an officer and still collected all the information normally gathered by a patrol officer. Having 24 hour access to their police departments, citizen response has been quite amazing and agencies are receiving thank you letters and emails praising the availability of this easy to use online service.

Gitmed goes on to advise the initial purchase of the system and yearly support fee includes hosting the application, therefore reducing the technology work to a minimum for IT staff. Additionally, their product can be customized to look and feel like a seamless extension of the agency. But perhaps the most significant aspect of the CopLogic system is the ability to interface with an agencies' in-house Records Management Systems (RMS).

Recommendations

The research of online crime reporting identifies advantages and disadvantages of implementing a system within a community. It is clear to this writer the advantages of the system far outweigh the disadvantages which can be overcome through technological measures and education within the community. But is online crime reporting compatible with the philosophy of community oriented policing? Community

Oriented Policing is a philosophy embracing problem solving and customer service. The philosophy encourages police departments and its members to serve as a resource to customers (residents, businesses, and visitors) providing tools and assistance to meet their needs. Research shows 18.6% of members within the community of Altamonte Springs chose not to report a minor crime because of the inconvenience of waiting for a police officer. The research also indicated 68.9% of community members would be more willing to report minor crimes if the option of online reporting was offered. Online crime reporting enhances customer service by providing an additional and convenient option for reporting minor crimes and therefore is compatible with community oriented policing. For those customers who do not feel comfortable with computers, or choose not to use online crime reporting for other reasons, the traditional option of reporting a crime via telephone with an officer dispatched remains available.

This writer without a doubt recommends implementing online crime reporting believing the system will perform three important tasks to help reduce opportunities for criminals:

1.) Bring into balance the number of crimes committed versus the number of crimes reported. This is accomplished by increasing the convenience factor for citizens to report a crime, and bridging the gap between non-English speaking victims and law enforcement.

2.) Provide a means to offer a third option for citizens to report crimes at a reasonable cost, therefore, allowing officers to remain in service for immediate response to violent crimes. This task will save law enforcement agencies money in the long run by providing increased patrol to "hot spots" and better response to violent crime without bearing the expense of hiring additional officers.

3.) By providing a system which encourages and allows for ease to report minor crimes, law enforcement officials will be better equipped to analyze an accurate crime picture in the community - hence able to develop precise crime trends for use by both citizens and patrol officers to deter crime.

Lieutenant Darin Farber has been with the Altamonte Springs Police Department since 1990. Darin has worked in several areas to include Patrol, Community-Oriented Police Services, School Resource Officer and Traffic. Darin currently supervises the Uptown Altamonte Unit consisting of four bike officers who patrol the city's premier live, work and play areas centered around Cranes Roost Park. Darin has an associate's degree in Criminal Justice from Seminole Community College and is pursuing his bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from Columbia College.

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Appendix A - Survey

1. Do you own a computer?

   Yes

   No

2. Do you have access to the Internet?

   Yes

   No

3. How would you rate your expertise level in using a computer to access and surf the Internet?

   Poor

   Fair

   Good

   Excellent

   Expert

4. How confident are you in the advancement of technology to protect your personal information transferred through the Internet?

   Not

   Somewhat

   Very

   Very much

5. How confident do you feel your personal information would be protected if transmitted over the Internet to the police department for crime reporting purposes?

   Not

   Somewhat

   Very

Very much

6. Have you ever been a victim of a minor crime and decided not to report the crime?

  Yes

  No

7. If you answered yes to question 6, was waiting for a police officer to respond a factor in not reporting the crime?

  Yes

  No

  N/A

8. If you answered yes to question 6, did you feel the matter was too trivial to report to the police?

  Yes

  No

  N/A

9. Would it make you more likely to report a minor crime if you could self-report it online from your home or business?

  Yes

  No

  Not sure

10. In which manner would you find it more convenient to report a crime?

  Through a computer?

  By phone with an officer dispatched to your home or work?

  Driving to the police department to report the crime?

11. How useful would it be to have the ability to print out a copy of the police report on your own printer within 24 hours?

Not useful at all

Somewhat useful

Useful

Very useful

12. How useful would it be to report a crime in your native language?

Not useful at all

Somewhat useful

Useful

Very useful

13. What is your native language?

English

Spanish

French

Chinese

Other (please specify)

[ ]

14. If your cell phone was stolen, would you prefer to have a police officer respond to take a report, or self-report the crime online?

Police officer respond to take the report

Self-report the crime myself online

15. If your mailbox was vandalized would you prefer to have a police officer respond to take a report, or self-report the crime online?

Police officer respond to take the report

Self-report the crime myself online

16. Do you think it would make a difference in identifying the suspect who committed the crime in question fifteen, if you self-reported the crime online, instead of having a police officer respond to the scene?

   No difference

   Some difference

   Significant difference

17. Do you personally believe online crime reporting sounds like a convenient option for reporting crimes to police and should be offered to the customers of the City of Altamonte Springs?

   Yes

   No

   Undecided

18. Do you believe online crime reporting may not be right for you, but still sounds like a convenient option for some people and should be offered to customers in the City of Altamonte Springs?

   Yes

   No

   Undecided

   N/A

19. Would you support your tax dollars being spent on a system which allowed citizens the choice to go online and self-report crimes; therefore allowing police officers to patrol neighborhoods and businesses for criminal activity and remain available to respond to 9-1-1 emergency calls for service?

   Yes

   No

   Undecided

20. Please take this opportunity to offer other thoughts or opinions you may have. Your input will be considered during our decision making process.

Appendix B - Survey Results

1. Do you own a computer?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	100.0%	63
No	0.0%	0

2. Do you have access to the Internet?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	100.0%	63
No	0.0%	0

3. How would you rate your expertise level in using a computer to access and surf the Internet?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Poor	1.6%	1
Fair	7.9%	5
Good	34.9%	22
Excellent	36.5%	23
Expert	19.1%	12

4. How confident are you in the advancement of technology to protect your personal information transferred through the Internet?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Not	11.3%	7
Somewhat	51.6%	32
Very	29.0%	18
Very Much	8.1%	5

5. How confident do you feel your personal information would be protected if transmitted over the Internet to the police department for crime reporting purposes?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Not	9.7%	6
Somewhat	54.8%	34
Very	29.0%	18
Very Much	6.5%	4

6. Have you ever been a victim of a minor crime and decided not to report the crime?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	31.8%	20
No	68.3%	43

7. If you answered yes to question 6, was waiting for a police officer to respond a factor in not reporting the crime?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	18.6%	11
No	23.7%	14
N/A	57.6%	34

8. If you answered yes to question 6, did you feel the matter was too trivial to report to the police?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	28.8%	17
No	11.9%	7
N/A	59.3%	35

9. Would it make you more likely to report a minor crime if you could self-report it online from your home or business?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	68.9%	42

No	9.8%	6
Not Sure	21.3%	13

10. In which manner would you find it more convenient to report a crime?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Through a computer	62.3%	38
By phone with officer dispatched	36.1%	22
Drive to the police department	1.6%	1

11. How useful would it be to have the ability to print out a copy of the police report on your own printer within 24 hours?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Not Useful	0.0%	0
Somewhat Useful	24.6%	15
Useful	37.7%	23
Very Useful	37.7%	23

12. How useful would it be to report a crime in your native language?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Not Useful	3.3%	2
Somewhat Useful	5.0%	3
Useful	33.3%	20
Very Useful	58.3%	35

13. What is your native language?

	Response Percent	Response Count
English	88.5%	54
Spanish	3.3%	2
French	0.0%	0
Other	8.2%	5

14. If your cell phone was stolen, would you prefer to have a police officer respond to take a report, or self-report the crime online?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Police officer respond	8.3%	5
Self-report	91.7%	55

15. If your mailbox was vandalized would you prefer to have a police officer respond to take a report, or self-report the crime online?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Police officer respond	26.2%	16
Self-report	73.8%	45

16. Do you think it would make a difference in identifying the suspect who committed the crime in question fifteen, if you self-reported the crime online, instead of having a police officer respond to the scene?

	Response Percent	Response Count
No difference	45.0%	27
Some difference	46.7%	28
Significant difference	8.3%	5

17. Do you personally believe online crime reporting sounds like a convenient option for reporting crimes to police and should be offered to the customers of the City of Altamonte Springs?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	72.1%	44
No	3.3%	2
Undecided	24.6%	15

18. Do you believe online crime reporting may not be right for you, but still sounds like a convenient option for some people and should be offered to customers in the City of Altamonte Springs?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	61.0%	36

No	5.1%	3
Undecided	15.3%	9
N/A	18.6%	11

19. Would you support your tax dollars being spent on a system which allowed citizens the choice to go online and self-report crimes; therefore allowing police officers to patrol neighborhoods and businesses for criminal activity and remain available to respond to 9-1-1 emergency calls for service?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	78.3%	47
No	5.0%	3
Undecided	16.7%	10

20. Thank you for participating in this survey. Please take this opportunity to offer other thoughts or opinions you may have of online crime reporting systems. Your input is important and will be considered during our decision making process.

Response Count

Answered question	22
Skipped question	41

Appendix C – Melbourne P.D. Website -
http://www.melbourneflorida.org/police/

Melbourne Police Department
Non-Emergency
Incident Reporting
City of Melbourne, Florida

Crime Prevention

- Drug Education
- Fingerprinting
- Identity Theft
- Non-Emergency Incident Reporting
- Pool Safety
- Scam Tips
- Sexual Predators & Wanted Offenders
- Suspicious Letters & Parcels
- Vehicle Stop

Specialized Units

- Crisis Negotiations Unit
- Dive Rescue Unit
- K - 9 Unit
- Marine Patrol Unit
- Stress Management Unit
- S.W.A.T.
- Community Service Officers

Services & Forms

- Alarm Registration
- Criminal History Requests
- Public Comments
- Registration & Applications

Non-Emergency Incident Reporting

If you have an emergency or if this incident requires an immediate medical, fire, or police response, contact the Melbourne Police Department immediately via telephone by dialing "911."

Before using the report form available on the Internet, please contact the MPD Communication Center non-emergency number, 321/409-2209. Communication Center personnel will determine if your incident meets the criteria for using the Incident Report Form available on the Internet.

In an effort to provide a more timely response to the needs of the citizens of Melbourne, the Police Department has become one of the first in the country to accept reports via the Internet. This will allow a more efficient use of police resources to assist the community. Police officers will be able to focus on emergency calls for service as needed. Citizens with non-emergency situations now have a method for submitting reports without first waiting to meet with an officer.

You can choose between two methods for providing a report:

CHOICE 1:	If you would like to use the online form that allows you to fill-in the blanks, **click here to access the online form**. Once you have filled-in the form, you simply click on the 'submit' button at the bottom of the page to send it to the Police Department.
CHOICE 2:	Also available is a simple, easy to use report form that may be downloaded and printed out. The form can then be either mailed or faxed to the Melbourne Police Department. **If you have "Adobe Reader" software on your computer, click here to access the form**.
Get Acrobat Reader Adobe	If not, you will first need to download and install the free "Adobe Reader" software in order to view or print the form. **Use this link to reach the page where the "Adobe Reader" software can be downloaded**.

When you have printed out the report form and completed filling it out, mail it to the **Melbourne Police Department at 650 N. Apollo Blvd., Melbourne 32935**, or submit it by fax to **321/242-0795**.

The submitted report will be reviewed on the business day following arrival at the Police Department. It will be routed to the appropriate division within the Department for entry in to our records system. You will be contacted to verify your information and/or to provide additional information if necessary.

Appendix D – O.C.S.O. Website

http://www.ocso.com/Agency/ElectronicCrimeReporting/tabid/316/Default.aspx

WELCOME TO THE ORANGE COUNTY, FLORIDA ONLINE REPORTING SYSTEM   ⊟

If this is an Emergency please call 911. If this incident is Traffic Crash Related, please call FHP @ 407-737-2200. Using this system allows you to submit a report immediately. Please confirm the following to find out if online filing is right for you:

- This is not an emergency.
- This incident occurred within the limits of unincorporated Orange County, Florida.
- There are no known suspects. **IF YOU HAVE A SUSPECT you CANNOT use this system,** you will need to contact the Communications Center at 407/836-HELP (4357) and have a deputy respond to take a report.
- You are at least 18 years of age.

If you answered yes to all of the above, you are ready to file your report online. If you answered no to any of these please look at our Frequently Asked Questions section.

Upon completion of this process you will:

- See the words: "Your report has been submitted" showing that your report is complete.
- Be given a case number.
- Be able to print a copy of the report to keep for your records.
- Be sent a confirmation and an unofficial copy of your report by e-mail so long as:
  - You provide a valid email address,
  - **You need to add 'EReporting@ocfl.net' to your contact list so that the notifications are not rejected by your email provider as "spam" or junk email.**

** Please do not use this e-mail address to report crimes other than those listed below or to request information on previous crimes reported to a deputy. You can contact the Communications Center at 407/836-

HELP (4357) for further assistance with these issues.

Please Note:

- All cases filed online will be reviewed.
- Upon review, if further investigation of your case is needed, you may be contacted.
- **Filing a false police report is a crime**.

Using the Orange County Florida Online Reporting System you can report the following incidents (please choose one):

Lost Property   Identity Theft   Theft   License Plate Lost/Stolen

Vehicle Burglary   Harassing Phone Calls   Vandalism   Vandalism to Vehicle

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Question: What do I do if online incident reporting is not right for me?
Answer: If your incident is an emergency, call 911. If it is not an emergency, call 407-836-HELP (4357).

Question: What if this happened in another County, or city? Can I file a report using this system?
Answer : No, if a crime did not take place in unincorporated Orange County, Florida Please call the Law Enforcement Agency that serves your City or County.

Question: What if this incident is related to a traffic crash?
Answer: If this incident is related to a traffic crash please call the Florida Highway Patrol Office @ 407-737-2200.

Question: What is a known suspect?
Answer : A known suspect is when you or someone else knows the person or where to find the person who committed the crime or the license plate number of the vehicle the suspect(s) were in.

Appendix E – Boise P.D. Website

http://www.cityofboise.org/Departments/Police/

REPORT A CRIME ONLINE

Welcome to the Boise Police Department Online Reporting System. **If this is an Emergency please call 911** . Using this system allows you to submit a report immediately. Please confirm the following to find out if online filing is right for you:

- **This is not an Emergency?**

- **This incident occurred within the Boise City limits?**

- **There are No Known suspects?**

If you answered **yes** to all of the above questions, you are ready to file your report online. If you answered no to any of the questions please look at our Frequently Asked Questions section.

Upon completion of this process you will:

- See the words: "Your report has been submitted" showing that your report is complete.

- Be given a case number.

- Be able to print a copy of the report to keep for your records.

Please Note:

- All cases filed online will be reviewed.

- Upon review, if further investigation of your case is needed, you may be contacted.

- Filing a false police report is a crime.

By choosing to file a report online, I agree that I have read the above information and understand that filing a false police report is a crime.

- Abandoned Vehicles ● Graffiti ● Harassing Phone Calls ● Lost Property ● Theft

- Traffic Concerns ● Vandalism ● Vehicle Break-In

Appendix F – San Jose, CA P.D. Website

http://www.sjpd.org/

Thank you for visiting our online reporting site. Our goal is to provide you with an easy to use tool for reporting crime in the City of San Jose. The process is quick and easy - simply fill out the forms, review the information for accuracy and print your police report right from your computer. **If this is an emergency, please dial 911. For non-emergencies, dial 311. The online site cannot process stolen license plates or reports that include suspects. Please call (408) 277-8900 to make a report.**

The Online report wizard can currently process the following types of crimes:

- **Vandalism**
- **Vehicle Tampering**
- **Harassing Phone Calls**
- **Fraud**

- **Lost Property**
- **Theft**
- **Vehicle Burglary**

Only crimes committed within the City of San Jose are accepted. This report is being filed for insurance purposes only. All crime information will be forwarded to officers working in your neighborhood. To receive an electronic copy of your report, a valid form of identification and email address is required. You may be contacted concerning this report. Filing a false police report is a crime and is punishable by state law.

Do you agree with the above statements?

☐ Yes   ☐ **No**

Report Progress Meter

ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

GENERAL ORDER

Effective Date: May 25, 2007	☐ **Rescinds** – G.O. 15.1.7 (October 11, 2006) ☐ **Amends**	**Number:** 15.1.7
SUBJECT: E-REPORTING		**Print Date:**
Distribution: ALL PERSONNEL	**CALEA Standards:** 81.2.14, 82.2.2, 82.3.5 **CFA Standards:**	

This order consists of the following:
1. Purpose
2. Policy
3. Definitions
4. Procedures

1. **Purpose**
   The purpose of this policy is to establish guidelines and procedures to determine when the Online Reporting System will be used.

2. **Policy**
   It is the policy of the Orange County Sheriff's Office to provide Online Reporting Services to the Community.

3. **Definitions**
   A. E-Report – an online police self-reporting system that is designed to eliminate the cost of having deputies physically respond to document no-suspect reports while still recording the incident and collecting reportable data for additional investigation, statistical analysis and state reporting requirements.

   B. Temporary Case Number – a case number issued by the E-Reporting system that is provided to the citizen upon completion of the report and is also sent by e-mail if an e-mail address is provided. This number is replaced by a permanent case number once the report is reviewed and approved. Reports can be found in the Records Management and Report systems by entering the Temporary Case number into the "CAD Call No" field. Rejected or deleted E-Reporting reports will have a temporary case number and the information submitted by the citizen will be retained in a .pdf document in Outlook.

C. Permanent Case Number – an Orange County Sheriff's Office case number that is issued once an Online Report has been reviewed and approved. All of these case numbers are in the 400,000 range for each year and can be searched in the Records Management and Report systems once it is exported from the Online Reporting application. Rejected or deleted E-Reporting reports will not have a permanent case number but the information submitted by the citizen will be retained in a .pdf document in Outlook.

D. Rejected Online Reports – reports that do not meet the requirements for being reported online or are bogus or have insufficient information will be rejected. These reports cannot be found in the Records Management and Report systems but the information submitted by the citizen is retained in a .pdf document in Outlook and can be reviewed at any time.

E. Review and Approve – Online Reports will be reviewed by Orange County Sheriff's Office personnel within the E-Reporting application. A preliminary "approval" is done within the E-Reporting application and then the report is "exported" to the Report system and is then processed in the same manner as reports submitted from the Mobile Report writing application and those written in the Report system. Supervisor approval will take place in the Report system.

4. **Procedures**
   A. General Guidelines
   The Orange County Sheriff's Office will respond to in-progress incidents and all crimes with evidence or information, which may lead to the identity of a suspect and his/her apprehension, or if the incident just occurred and there is a likelihood the suspect may still be in the area.

   The following crimes and reports may be referred to the Online Reporting System as long as the reporter is at least 18 years old and there is no suspect information available:
   1. All petit/grand thefts, excluding firearms and materials threatening to public safety, i.e., explosives or highly toxic substances.

   2. Missing/lost property.

   3. Criminal Mischief to public or private property including damage to a motor vehicle without suspect information.

   4. Auto Burglary.

   5. Identity theft.

6. Harassing phone calls.

B. Communications Personnel Responsibilities
   1. When Communications personnel receive a call from a citizen wishing to report an incident, the Communications operator will determine if the call falls within the scope of an online report. If so, Communications personnel shall:
      a. Determine if the citizen has Internet access.
      b. Determine if the call type meets the criteria for online reporting.
      c. Inform the caller that they have the option of filing this report online, which would allow them to file the report immediately, as well as, print a copy of the report for free.
      d. Advise the caller of the Orange County Sheriff's Office website address: www.OCSO.com, which will guide them through filing a report.

C. Report Approval Responsibilities
   1. Personnel assigned to Differential Report Writing (DRW) duties will review the E-Reports queue throughout their shift and import approved reports in the Online Reporting System. If the citizen report is misclassified, such as vandalism, instead of an auto burglary, the DRW will classify the report according to the elements of the offense described by the citizen author.

   2. The DRW will refrain from making grammatical corrections to citizens' reports that may change the factual basis of the report, unless they are minor in nature, such as, "Orange" spelled as "Ornge." If the DRW determines the report was misclassified, it may be modified to fit the most appropriate section. Any changes made by the reviewer are tracked in the Online Reporting System.

   3. If the citizen is reporting an incident that is minor in nature and occurred in another jurisdiction and the citizen is a resident of our jurisdiction, the report may be re-classified as an outside assist and approved.

   4. If there is a question as to the report's content, in lieu of rejecting the Online Report, the reviewer shall attempt to contact the reporting citizen by telephone or e-mail to make the correction to the Online Report.

   5. If the DRW rejects a report, the reason for rejection will be appropriately and professionally noted in the rejection box, which is

sent via e-mail to the citizen and a duplicate to a department storage mailbox.

6. The DRW shall request a Patrol response when, in the reasonable judgment of the DRW, circumstances indicate an investigation is warranted. In this circumstance, a rejection should be sent to the citizen and the officer will state in the rejection box that a response will be made. This will be followed by attempting telephone contact with the citizen to coordinate the appropriate patrol response.

D. Supervisor Approval Responsibilities
1. Each patrol supervisor shall be responsible for reviewing/approving reports that have been forwarded to ARS by the DRW at the end of their assigned shift.

2. Reports that have been received through E-Reporting will be available for supervisor review on the same screen as the patrol deputies' reports.

_____

SHERIFF KEVIN BEARY

Appendix H – O.C.S.O. Online Reporting Brochure

PLEASE NOTE

Do **NOT** use the online reporting system for the following:

◆ **Emergencies**
Please dial 9-1-1 for emergency situations.

◆ **Traffic Crashes**
Contact the Florida Highway Patrol at 407-737-2200

◆ **The Incident Occurred Within a Municipality**
Please contact the law enforcement agency of the city where the incident occurred.

◆ **There Is a Known Suspect**
If you have a suspect, you cannot use the online reporting system. Please contact the Orange County Sheriff's Office Communications Center at 407-836-HELP (4357) and have a deputy respond to write a report.

◆ **You Are Under 18 Years of Age**
Have an adult who is 18 years of age or older report the incident for you.

ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
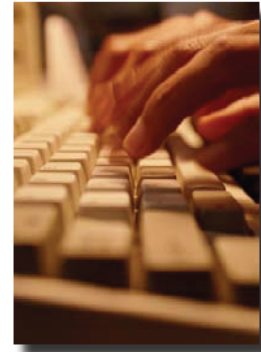2500 West Colonial Drive
Orlando, FL 32804

**Emergency
9-1-1**

**Non-Emergency
407-836-HELP (4357)**

Visit us online at **www.ocso.com**

ORANGE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE
Kevin Beary, Sheriff

presents

E-REPORTING
File a Police Report Online

www.ocso.com

10-1798 (7/07)

Welcome to the O.C.S.O. Online Reporting System

Now you can report certain non-emergency incidents from the privacy of your computer. The incident must meet the following criteria:

- ◆ It must be a non-emergency such as the following:
  - Lost Property
  - Vehicle Burglary
  - Identity Theft
  - Harassing Phone Calls
  - Theft
  - Vandalism
  - License Plate Lost/Stolen
  - Vandalism to Vehicle

- ◆ The incident must have occurred within the limits of unincorporated Orange County.

- ◆ There are NO known suspects.

- ◆ You're at least 18 years of age.

How Do I Use the E-Reporting System?

Visit the Orange County Sheriff's Office website at www.ocso.com and click on the E-Reporting icon. Then follow the user-friendly prompts which will guide you through the process.
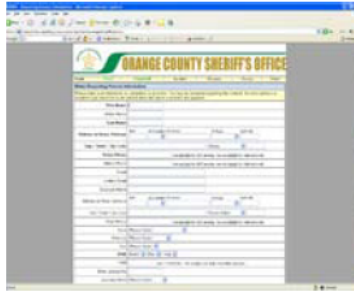
How Does It Work?

Once you go through all the prompts and complete the process, you will see the message "Your report has been submitted" and will be given a case number. You will also be able to print a copy of the report for your records. You will also be sent a confirmation and an unofficial copy of your report via e-mail.

What Happens After I File My Report?

All cases filed online will be reviewed. If further investigation of your case is needed, you may be contacted.

Orange County Law Enforcement Agencies

Apopka Police Department
407-703-1757

Eatonville Police Department
407- 623-1300

Edgewood Police Department
407-851-2820

Maitland Police Department
407-539-6262

Oakland Police Department
407-656-9797

Ocoee Police Department
407-656-1313

Orange County Sheriff's Office
407-836-HELP (4357)

Orlando Police Department
407-235-5300

Orlando P.D. Airport
407-825-2065

University of Central Florida Police Dept.
407-823-5555

Windermere Police Department
407-876-3757

Winter Garden Police Department
407-656-3636

Winter Park Police Department
407-644-1313

Visit www.ocso.com to report non-emergencies.