

Hosting an IAATI Conference
How It Helped Us Reduce Auto Crime By 73%
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When I was first asked to write this article on how we managed to reduce auto crime in British Columbia, Canada, by 73%, it started me thinking about where exactly this turn around began and about the IAATI conferences, and not just the ones I had the privilege of attending over the years but the one we organized in Vancouver in 2000.

There is no question that organizing a conference is a lot of work but it has one indisputable advantage for the organizing city and that's the fact that a large number of local officers and civilians will either be involved in putting it together or get a chance to actually attend the conference and hear the various presentations.

I can even tell you when the turnaround began. It was on a Thursday afternoon, in one of the last training sessions of the week. On that day Jolene Lindner, then of the Minneapolis Police Department, made a presentation on their innovative Bait Car program. It was a popular presentation, in fact the room was filled to overflowing and we had to leave the doors open so people in the hall could hear the presentation. Jolene talked about how a combination of GPS and camera technology combined with strategic deployment of the vehicles and an innovative advertising campaign had combined to dramatically reduce auto crime in their city.

As a result of holding this conference on our home turf many of our officers who attended would later play pivotal roles in bringing this program to life. In Vancouver Detective Phil Ens, who worked with us on the conference organizing committee, subsequently placed a camera, video recorder and GPS unit in a tricked-out Acura Integra which was then parked in a high risk location. The same morning it was placed in the parking lot, the Integra was moved and it's tires stolen. Det. Ens returned to the vehicle and checked the video which confirmed that the thieves were a couple of well-known local thieves who were promptly arrested. They got jail time and the idea of a bait car program in Vancouver was born. Phil's partner, Det. John Rennie along with Vancouver PD, Det. Scott Cooke, both of whom were at the conference, were instrumental in getting the Bait Car program up and running in Vancouver. Without their dedication and belief in the program, which was largely based on what we learned at our IAATI conference, the program would never have gotten off the ground.

But, like all new ideas, it still took some time to get a full program up and running. Nevertheless by September 2002 we were finally able to initiate our Bait Car pilot program in Vancouver

along with an ad campaign that initially involved radio and print media. The program was an immediate success resulting in a significant drop in auto crime during the first 3 months of operation. Meanwhile other municipalities in the region continued to experience significant increases.

With the success of the Vancouver pilot program we were able to convince senior management both in policing and the Insurance Corporation of BC that this program could be expanded throughout the province. This led to the development of the largest bait car program anywhere in the world, run by the Integrated Municipal Provincial Auto Crime Team (IMPACT) and supported by the provincial government and the Insurance Corporation of BC. Our contact at IMPACT during the start-up phase was Det. Enzo Nadalin, another of the officers who worked on the conference organizing committee.

With the advent of the provincial bait car program we never looked back. The month after the program began we registered an 11% decrease in auto theft in the Greater Vancouver region, and by the end of the year we were down 12%. In fact, for the first 100 months after the inception of the program, when we compared incidents with the same month for the previous year, we saw decreases in auto theft in 97 of them.

In time the bait car program became the centrepiece of an overall strategy that involved:

- Police target teams focused on vehicle theft
- An intelligence based approach to deployment of bait cars
- Using civilian volunteers to deploy the bait cars in order to reduce the manpower requirements of the program
- Focus on innovative media and marketing campaigns to promote our strategies, these included
 - An Auto Crime Enforcement Month with a media launch involving police, government and insurance industry representation
 - Well publicized lists of Top 10 most wanted car thieves over the first 9 years we've featured 90 thieves, of these 85 were arrested, 4 left the province and one has disappeared entirely)
 - Extensive use of bait car videos on TV and the Internet
 - An award winning radio and print advertising campaigns
 - Bait car signage and banners, declaring that bait cars are everywhere, displayed at high risk locations such as shopping centres, community centres and parkades
 - Community policing vehicles and police paddy wagons with 'Steal a Bait Car, Go to Jail' messaging on the back and sides

As a result of the efforts of many officers and civilians, on a province wide basis we have experienced 9 years of continuous improvement with some of the largest reductions occurring in 2006, several years after the program had been initiated, which shows the power or

perseverance. Now, at the end of 2012 we have experienced an overall decline of 73% in vehicle thefts. The lowest level in several decades

Now I don't want to imply that the Bait Car program did it all, because that's never the case. Another advantage of holding the conference on our home turf was the fact that many other officers became more interested in auto theft investigations. This allowed IMPACT to develop into one of the most effective integrated investigative units in the province. Over the years IMPACT has been highly effective in targeting chronic offenders with a conviction rate well above 90%, furthermore research has shown that the sentences these target teams achieve through their very comprehensive approach to auto theft investigations are usually more than 3x the average.

My company, the Insurance Corporation of BC, along with IMPACT and a number of other organizations throughout the country were also successful in lobbying the Federal government to mandate the installation of immobilizers in all passenger and light truck vehicles, starting with the 2008 models. Knowing that the law was due to be implemented, many of the vehicle manufacturers had already started immobilizing their higher risk vehicles and with the legislation approaching they started to immobilize their entire fleet of new vehicles. As a result the theft rates for newer vehicles has been significantly lowered and as older vehicles continue to be replaced by newer, immobilized vehicles, we are confident that we will continue to see reductions in vehicle theft in the coming years.

Dennis St Aubin has worked for the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia for 31 years, initially as an adjuster and later a manager. For the past 18 years he's been a manager for Auto Crime Strategies in the Road Safety department, organizing everything from training conferences to prevention strategies and ad campaigns.

Editor's Note: Thanks to IAATI ATPA Committee Chairs Denise Cassano and Reg Phillips for sending this in.