



# Croydon Case Study 1

## The Croydon pharmacy robberies – a proactive approach to crime reduction

### Background ....

In the period January to June 2002 there were 14 robberies at pharmacies in South London. The robberies were violent in nature with knives used to threaten pharmacy staff. The target was cash. Police intelligence suggested there were as many as 30 individuals involved, in two or three gangs, co-ordinating their attacks across South London, a large geographical area. Off-licences were also targeted by these groups and are a frequent target for crime in South London, but pharmacies had never before been targeted in such volume and in such an organised manner.

The response from the Police to this unexpected and frightening spate of robberies was to suggest the introduction of a series of measures to target harden premises, using the latest security technology and training in good practice procedures. This approach was part of a fledgling crime reduction initiative called **Raid-control**. As a result there have been no robberies at pharmacies in South London since the equipment was installed and pharmacists and their staff feel much safer.

### So how did this initiative come about ....

Eight of the 14 pharmacy robberies were in Croydon Borough. Croydon Crime Prevention Officer (CPO) Kevin Hitch was drafted in to advise pharmacists on how to protect their premises from more attacks. Hitch comments: 'The robberies had sent shock waves through the pharmaceutical community and indeed the wider community in Croydon because these are businesses that are often owned and staffed by local people. My job was to find a cost-effective way of introducing security measures to premises that had very little protection in place because the only threat they had protected against previously was shoplifting.'

The secretary of Croydon Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) Andrew McCoig of 'McCoig' pharmacies was a focal point for the fears of pharmacy owners in Croydon who had either been victims of the robberies or were afraid of being next in line. McCoig comments: 'I was inundated with e-mails and phone calls. We pharmacists weren't used to dealing with this type of crime and so we were soft targets. The use of threatening weapons as part of the robberies was particularly frightening for the individuals involved and led to a number of staff resigning, which creates its own problems. Needless to say, we were in need of a solution – and quickly'.

Following visits to a number of the pharmacies that had been victims of robbery, Hitch determined that basic weaknesses in both security and procedures were common features. Given that the target of the robberies was cash, Hitch believed that till protection equipment was a must. He contacted the Metropolitan Police Service Flying Squad Crime Prevention Co-ordinator Alan Townsend and Digby Ram, director of IBP International Ltd and Chairman of the British Security Industry Association's Cash and Property Marking Section. Townsend and Ram had already been involved in the highly successful national initiative Banknote Watch, aimed at reducing the circulation of stolen banknotes, with the slogan 'a stained note is probably a stolen note'. They had already discussed the possibility of establishing an initiative specifically for the retail environment and the Croydon pharmacy robberies presented the ideal opportunity to put theory into practice.

### Tackling the problem ....

Townsend and Ram devised a series of measures designed to combat the specific risks associated with retail crime – these measures are now known as **Raid-control**. They include staff training in raid awareness, cash minimised, time delay systems, camera(s) in operation and stolen cash traceable (cash

staining systems in use). Finances from Communities Against Drugs (CAD) funds paid for the equipment and its installation, which cost under £2,000 per premises.

There are 68 pharmacies in Croydon Borough and 23 qualified for the CAD funding. Of those 23, four could not be fitted with the **Raid-control** package because the tills were too close to the entrance to the premises; a distance of two metres is required in order for the cash staining systems to work, although the technology is now being adapted so that it can accommodate tills located next to entrances. Throughout June 2002, 19 were fitted with **Raid-control** equipment and implemented the staff-training package.

Following completion a CPO visited each premises from Croydon Police to assess if they merited **Raid-control** status. All 19 were successful and were presented with **Raid-control** window stickers to alert criminals to the security measures inside. The window stickers play an important deterrent role.

To date, since **Raid-control** was introduced to the Croydon pharmacies there have been no more robberies.

## What has been the reaction to **Raid-control** ....

### *The Pharmacist*

Beran Patel, owner/pharmacist at 'Brigstock' pharmacy in Croydon was the victim of a robbery in January 2002: 'I was in the premises with one other member of staff when we were robbed. There were four of them and they all had knives. A knife was thrust in my face so of course I offered no resistance. As it was shortly after Christmas we had a lot of money in the till and out in the back room including pay packets; they took a substantial amount of money.'

'I have experienced some staffing problems since the robbery because people were understandably frightened. When I learned about the security measures they intended to install in the premises I was very encouraged. In fact I was quite surprised because I didn't really expect such a swift and pragmatic response from the Police as they have a lot of crime to contend with in South London.'

'The equipment itself has brought peace of mind to me and to my staff and the training has addressed the type of complacency about crime that arises when you haven't been targeted before. For example, we keep a substantially smaller amount of cash on the premises now. The training package was provided on a CD Rom, which was a good way of presenting the information.'

'I would certainly recommend **Raid-control**. Everyone should have it. Even if the funding hadn't been available I would have invested in these measures because they really address the specific problems retailers face.'

### *The Secretary of the Local Pharmaceutical Committee*

Andrew McCoig, secretary of the LPC and owner of two 'McCoig' pharmacies in Croydon fitted with **Raid-control** comments: 'One of my premises was a victim of the spate of robberies. In addition, in my role as secretary of the LPC, I was responsible for the concerns of all the other pharmacists in the area. When I met Kevin Hitch I have to admit I didn't expect much from him. I certainly didn't expect the dedicated approach he took to solving our problem and the innovative solution he proposed.'

'**Raid-control** is an exciting approach to reducing crime; it worked for us and I can see it working for pharmacies in other parts of the country and in other retail premises. Before experiencing the effectiveness of the security equipment in the **Raid-control** package I was suspicious of the security industry and felt that the equipment it tried to sell to me was not suited to the crime problems I faced. As a result, I only had a burglar alarm with panic button installed in my premises.'

'In contrast, **Raid-control** security equipment is tailored to the specific problems we face in small retail outlets, namely protection of cash. It's also cost-effective, so I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to others.'

### *The Crime Prevention Officer*

Having managed the initiative in Croydon, Kevin Hitch - the CPO tasked with assessing the pharmacies to **Raid-control** standards - is in a unique position to evaluate the impact of the scheme: 'The package of measures Alan Townsend and Digby Ram proposed - now known as **Raid-control** - has had a significant

impact in Croydon. The response from the pharmacists has been very positive and a number of additional outlets have now purchased **Raid-control** equipment independently because they are so impressed with it.'

'From a CPO's point of view this is an easy-to-use retail crime reduction package. Something we've not had at our disposal before. It's nice to be able to offer a proactive solution and the community really appreciate Police involvement in this way. It's easy to think of business crime as only affecting the business itself, but that business is often run by local people for local people, so it actually affects the whole community.'

'The package itself comprises a site survey questionnaire tailored to the retail environment, an equipment toolkit and a retailer self-training programme to ensure that CPOs don't have to spend too long in each premises. So having recommended a premises for **Raid-control** all the CPO has to do is visit it once after installation and training is complete to assess if it meets the required level of security to be awarded **Raid-control** status.'

'Once **Raid-control** status is awarded, the premises can display the **Raid-control** window sticker and other deterrent material to alert criminals to the security measures inside. This will become a powerful deterrent when the **Raid-control** brand becomes more widely known.'

'I hope that this pilot project in Croydon is the launch pad for a national **Raid-control** initiative because this is the sort of proactive policing that benefits everyone concerned, except the criminals of course!'

### ***The Police Team Manager***

DCI Mark Stafford is the Proactive Team Manager at Croydon Police and is responsible for the work of the CPOs on the **Raid-control** project: 'One of our key priorities in the Metropolitan Police Service and in Croydon Borough is the reduction of robbery offences using both proactive policing and a problem solving approach. The intention is to deliver long-term sustained reduction and prevention. Target hardening, coupled with reduced pay-off and increased chance of detection, assists this strategy.'

'As street crime comes under increased pressure from active policing the tendency may be for the criminals to turn to what is perceived to be a soft-target. So any initiative that makes such premises less attractive to would-be-thieves is welcomed.'

'**Raid-control** is good use of a CPO's time and the local storekeepers now feel supported. I would recommend **Raid-control** to other Boroughs in the Metropolitan Police and beyond.'

### **Conclusions ....**

In response to a violent spate of robberies at pharmacies in South London a new initiative to combat retail crime has been successfully piloted. **Raid-control** involves the implementation of a package of measures tailored to the specific needs of small retailers.

Those involved in the initiative: the pharmacists, the Local Pharmaceutical Committee, the Crime Prevention Officer and the Team Manager at Croydon Police all recommend that **Raid-control** is extended to other pharmacies and indeed to other small retailers.

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