

# ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH THE WORK OF COMMUNITY POLICING

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**Abstract:** *Environmental crime leaves broad consequences for environment and sustainable development. Because of the growing presence and danger of environmental crime, it requires an adequate reaction of the society (the state). This paper will point out the possibility of unifying these efforts by applying community policing. This concept is based on the problem oriented policing, it means identifying and analyzing problems and finding of adequate prevention that would be realized through partnership of actors of social reaction with citizens. The main obstacle for higher results is the lack of police officers specialized in this type of crime, as well as the lack of awareness among police officers and citizens about the dangers of environmental pollution. Identified directions of countering environmental crime should be supported by appropriate normative and educational framework, with appropriate material and technical basis, which would create a suitable setting for action within the framework of community policing. Regarding environmental issues, the scientific and professional public should certainly be included. Community policing should be part of a comprehensive, coherent strategy to combat environmental crime.<sup>1</sup>*

**Keywords:** *environmental crime, police, community policing, prevention of environmental crime.*

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Environmental crime is an extremely harmful and dangerous criminal phenomenon that results in environmental pollution, exhaustion of natural resources, destruction of the habitat of the plant and animal world, and above all, it's questioning the health and survival of people. It is characterized by heftiness, continuous and dynamic development, organization, often with presence of an element of foreignness, adaptability to social, political and economic relations. It "reduces state revenues, violates the rule of law, instigates corruption, imposes violence on the local community and puts in jeopardy those who fight it" [Elliott 2012: 104]. The particular danger of this type of crime is in "victimology aspects, where everyone's a victim, which creates an atmosphere in which no one is a victim" [Ljuština, 2005: 713]. These are just some of the reasons why the fight against environmental crime must become the priority of all those in charge in the social reaction chain, and especially the police as an irreplaceable factor in this battle.

Because of the possibility of acquiring high profits and a low risk for its "protagonists", environmental crime is in constant expansion. What contributes to this phenomenon is the lack of specialized organizational units and experts for this type of crime, the lack of legal regulation and the inconsistency in its implementation, and above all, an ineffective penal policy.

Considering that "repressive measures usually do not give significant results because the forms of these delicts are hidden or perpetrators remain unknown, the preventive work of the police fights exactly causes and conditions of environmental crime", [Ljuština, 2012: 148], one of the responses to this type of security threat, identified as the community policing model, offers numerous advantages in the fight against crime (as demonstrated by experiences of countries in which it is implemented), which can and must be used in the prevention of environmental crime.

What is recommended by the concept of community policing as a preferred way of acting against environmental crime is precisely the idea on which it is based, and that is that the police can not confront crime alone, but must rely on the community and do so in collaboration with it.

Community policing related to environmental crime is demonstrated by the proactive and valid response of the police and the entire security system, in particular by anticipating environmental problems and effective solutions. More specifically, before it comes to endangering the environment, citizens have a role to initiate protection and proactively prevent its endangerment (especially in the form of environmental crime), and if the environmental crime occurs, to cut and eliminate its consequences. This concept and way of work involve high level and very frequent communication and data exchange between the police and other entities responsible for the problem of environmental crime. The realization of (multi-agency) preventive action through making preventive programs in accordance with priority areas of prevention and combating environmental crime, is understood on the basis of knowledge by practice and it is particularly (as a missing activity) emphasized. The exposed framework and the postulates of community policing can, as the experience of modern effective and efficient response to environmental crime shows, contribute and enable the creation of a legal and real social atmosphere in which a proactive and effective attitude towards environmental crime is the essence of everyday activities of citizens and competent

structures from all three social sectors (sector of government, business sector and third - so-called non-governmental sector).

## 2 DETERMINING THE COMMUNITY POLICING

The concept of community policing was created on an argumentative criticism of traditional way of policing, on the examination and finding alternatives, and advocates for the change of the dominant philosophy of working by the rule of aggressive and interventional police. While the traditional mode of police work is repressive and reactive, with a centralized and hierarchical organizational structure, and the relations between managers and policemen is a military-bureaucratic type, the concept of the community policing is based on the idea of the police as a public service and characterized by a flexible and decentralized approach to police work, which focuses on crime prevention. It can be said that crime prevention is the essence of community policing.<sup>2</sup>

This concept transforms the classic model of performing a police role, and its overall activity communicates with the expectations and needs of citizens, as well as their need to participate adequately and effectively in the overall social reaction against crime. Its realization should mark a milestone in relation between the police and citizens and should fundamentally change the police's approach to solving the community's problems. Police should serve citizens, and attitudes and expectations of citizens must be taken as a relevant factor that significantly influences the direction and character of police activities. Community policing offers a deeper and more quality relationship that concerns community involvement in concrete activities in achieving safety of the community, and is the joint action of police and community. As such, police is an integral part of the community and is sensitive to its changes and needs. That is why it is perceived as a service that is here to provide for citizens, not an imposed force. All this involves a change in organization, mode of operation, management, value system, and also flexibility that allows customising changes and problems of a particular community. The aforementioned characteristics of community policing (adaptability, integration into the community, preventive action, etc.) recommend this concept as an acceptable and desirable model of police work in fighting environmental crime which is characterized by various forms of appearance (starting from, for example, waste dumping, to nonstandard transport radioactive material).

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2 It is possible to determinate six common characteristics between crime prevention and community policing: 1) The aim of crime prevention and the community policing is to build a safe community for all its citizens; 2) It is desirable to solve the cause of the problem, and not just react to its manifest forms; 3) It is necessary to react not only to the external environment and to solving problems in certain infrastructural hotspots, but also to find models for solving the social causes of the problem; 4) crime prevention and community policing require active involvement of citizens in identifying and solving problems; 5) The focus is on the development of partnership between the different participants; 6) Crime prevention and community policing are models for solving the security situation in the local community, based on which are developed techniques and methods for providing services. Therefore it is necessary that crime prevention techniques and community policing be tailored to the needs of a particular local community. – More: [Palmiotto 2011:151-178].

The community policing is in practice identified by two basic modalities of its expression: partnership with citizens (community) and problem oriented policing.

### 3 PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY

In order for the concept of community policing to be effective, the police must know the community in which it operates, must mobilize and establish a partnership with it and must respond to its problems and needs. This will be achieved in a proactive approach in its operation, improvement of services provided to citizens, joint identification and problem solving.

An necessary requirement for such an approach is the decentralization of the police, raising the responsibility and individualism of policemen to a higher level. New knowledge and skills are expected from them, which would later enable a new approach in dealing with citizens and establishing relationships based on trust. "Public confidence in the police is a prerequisite for effective police work. Without this trust, citizens will not be prepared to report crimes and give the police the information they need for successful work" [Greenwood et al., 2005], and even less would they themselves and / or through their (non-governmental) organizations, associations, movements and initiatives participate in the prevention and combating crime, including environmental crime, in which they are the participant with no alternative (both as carriers of threat and as a factor of social reaction).

The basic idea of the partnership is cooperation between the police and citizens in solving the basic problems of the local community, including environmental protection and combating environmental crime. Because environmental crime is extremely diverse and complex, ranges from the easiest violations to serious crimes, so police can not successfully confront it alone, without the help, cooperation and participation of the community.

The engagement of the community through partnership with the police allows it to express its views in terms of environmental problems and reveal most endangering ones, which can result in their inclusion in the police's priority action and practice.

For now, through various forms of partnership between the police and communities, preventing and combating environmental crime is given very little to almost no attention. In order to overcome this situation, and in order to establish and promote the prevention of environmental crime through the partnership of the police and the community, it is necessary for the police to have programs that will animate the community and gain its support for community policing methods that are planned for specific areas, and also its active participation in them. The partnership between the police and the community, and the mutual relations built on respect and trust, will result in timely warnings, information and notifications about environmental crime. Based on that, transparent division of tasks, good coordination and reporting achievements, could all lead to continuous improvement and optimised cooperation between the police and citizens, regarding the promotion and protection of the environment and prevention of environmental crime.

## 4 PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING

Within the framework of the community policing concept, what is identified is a special police prevention activity, which is expressed in forms of problem-oriented policing, based on the principle that solving causes of a particular problem is a better (more efficient) solution than a delayed response to it. In this way, the police is to focus more on the conditions and causes of crime and other forms of socially undesirable behaviour and to the implementation of preventive strategies and programs, and not to react only when the consequences occur, as the police normally do.

The first step in problem oriented policing is to identify and define the security problem that should be solved. The police should be facing problems and should not be waiting for them to develop. When determining the problem, it is necessary to identify a “set of similar, connected or repetitive incidents, rather than one particular event that causes concern of the community or is the topic of police work” [Goldstein 1990: 66]. The problem needs to be explored, collected and basic information about it needs to be analyzed, and then alternatives to solving this problem should be found. After that, the police assess the effect of the activities undertaken to see whether the problems are solved, facilitated or remained the same [Simonović 2006: 56-65].

Applying problem-oriented policing implies, inter alia, “different forms of cooperation between the police, other agencies and institutions; implies the influence of the community and its participation in the creation of a secure community” [Cordner 1995: 55-57 towards to Nikač 2014: 102].

This indicates that, in order to effectively counteract environmental crime, the police must focus on the “problems” that are causing it, rather than “incidents”. In order not to repeatedly solve the same “incidents”, the police is solving problems that lead to the repetition of these environmental incidents. This approach requires a change in the entire philosophy of police work, which must be followed by a new, customized organization, work mode, training and accountability of the police which promotes the concept of police in the community.

## 5 COMMUNITY POLICING AS AN IMMANENT PARADIGM OF FIGHTING ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

As it has been pointed out before, when it comes to the police reaction to contemporary forms of crime, the traditional way of policing, bureaucratized and alienated from the community, with predominantly repressive actions, while neglecting prevention and quality relationships with citizens, proved to be ineffective. Community policing is a good framework for proactive, creative and innovative policing which serious forms of crime are demanding. This way of work encourages police to act before crime happens and is well informed about all of the conditions and problems that exist in the given environment and which could lead to environmental crime or favour its creation.

For a long time it was considered that the police has no specific jurisdiction or the need to deal with these “insignificant jobs”. However, in a modern ambient where environmental crimes often result in very serious consequences, the police is becoming more and more responsible for timely reaction, both through mechanisms of prevention, as well as through

repressive measures and actions [Матијевић 2009].

Applying basic principles and concepts of building and strengthening so far, the preventive capacities for reaction to environmental crime is obviously not sufficient and/or it is not right. It is necessary to adapt the existing ones and to design new preventive programs, activities and measures. For beginning, it should primarily strengthen those that will enable the flow of information and understanding by the public that does not have enough knowledge, nor it seriously understands the consequences of environmental crime. This is because environmental crime imposes new challenges that determine the need of an active and coordinated action of the whole community against this type of crime. "Campaigns directed to publicity of preventive measures can enhance their influence, and according to the targeted group two types of campaigns differ: 1. Campaigns aimed at potential victims; and 2. Campaigns aimed at potential perpetrators" [Barthe 2006 према Вуковић 2017: 147].

"Environmental problems do not suffer any kind of disposal, but imperatively require finding optimal solutions through a new relationship and approach to this problem. It is very important not to give partial solutions in relation to the problem of combating environmental crime, but that adequate changes that lead to systematic solutions of the protection and improvement of the environment and more efficient combating of environmental crime" [Бошковић 1993: 63]. Community police must be part of that systemic approach in opposing environmental crime.

Bearing in mind that the solid theoretical and practical foundation stemming from the good experiences of the countries in which the concept of the community policing has been implemented, it is quite justified to expect that this model of police work can give some results in the prevention of environmental crime, which will be discussed further in the continuation in this paper.

## **6 CONTRIBUTION OF COMMUNITY POLICING IN ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME PREVENTION**

In order to effectively and efficiently act against environmental crime through community policing, the specific security threats caused by this type of crime must first be perceived, as well as identifying the roles of the police and ways of solving these threats within this concept.

In the continuation of the paper will be exposed only a few of the modalities of community policing, for which practice has shown that it could be applied in the prevention of environmental crime.

Foot police patrols are especially important for the prevention of all forms of crime, including environmental crime. The continuous presence of police officers in a certain area (sector) for a longer period of time allows them to get to know citizens who live and work in that community, as well as to timely notice (recognize) the circumstances (conditions and causes) that can lead to the environmental crime and environmental degradation. Visibility and availability of the police officer and direct daily contacts with citizens contribute to the improvement and establishing of regular, two-way channels of communication. This way, it encourages cooperation and it is establishing mutual trust between the police and the community. In direct contact with citizens, police officers should work to raise their awareness

of the importance of preserving the environment, especially if its endangering is the result of ignorance, arrogance, misunderstanding or poverty.

Organization of special patrols to visit the areas where numerous indications of environmental pollution or environmental crime are manifested would provide a direct insight into a specific problem, as well as observation of the places and opportunities that endanger the environment (eg various laboratories, workshops, warehouses, storage of explosive, toxic and other dangerous substances, pollution of rivers, lakes, the devastation of the forests, etc.), and better collecting of documentation and information about the sector, which will be interpreted, documented and forwarded to the competent authorities.

Police officers are expected to show an initiative and be creative in solving the problem, which encourages partnership with other institutions and, at the same time, enables better utilisation of their professional potentials.

Environmental crime is extremely specific and complex, and is often the result of ignorance of regulations, negligence, laziness, incompetence, lack of attention or malicious intentions on the basis of intention to get a quick profit. Given these characteristics, isolated police response would not have satisfactory results. Therefore, the preventive action against environmental crime must be conceptually set on the broadest basis. In addition to the police, other social subjects, especially citizens, who are an inevitable subject in the prevention of environmental crime, must participate in it. Citizens are certainly the main bearers of preventive measures and activities in fighting environmental crime. Every citizen as a resource user of nature and as a factor in the overall relation to nature and its values can significantly influence the effective protection of these resources. However, at the same time, every citizen is potential threat to the natural environment through his individual actions [Matijević 2009]. With its human and material resources, the police is the main and most powerful subject in the prevention of environmental crime, but cooperation and direct contact with citizens is irreplaceable. By involving citizens in preventive programs, with simultaneous education, their expertise and professionalism are strengthened, while reducing the possibility of illegal activities in the form of environmental crimes and violations at the same time. Communication with citizens must be regular, proactive, reciprocal, transparent and inclusive.

Police officers should be trained and encouraged to teach citizens to take part in solving their environmental security problems directly and in cooperation with the police. Citizens can be encouraged to report physical and legal persons that pollute or in any other way endanger the environment to the police; can observe suspicious occurrences and events which are feared to turn into a form of environmental pollution or to visit some risk areas where ecological accident could happen; then, organize protests or gatherings at locations with high levels of environmental crime; organize meetings with the media in order to get acquainted with environmental problems; submit petitions or in any other way exert pressure on the institutions responsible for environmental crime issues, ie, environmental protection.

An increase of environmental crime indicates that the social reaction is inefficient and insufficient. Transferring responsibilities from one to another factor of security, tells about the lack of coordination, inter-institutional cooperation, information and collaboration. There is also a lack of involvement of scientific and educational institutions in solving environmental problems. The preventive activity of inspection bodies, public prosecutors and courts is weak. By multiagency approach, as a form of community policing, most of these problems can be overcome.

The problem of environmental crime and environmental protection requires solving series of questions which are political, social, economic and cultural character outside the jurisdiction of the police. Therefore, the police must establish cooperation and constructive working relationships with other state bodies, social organizations, local governments, public services, enterprises, associations, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, citizen associations, self-organized individuals and other entities in the society for a multidisciplinary approach to environmental problems. Synergistic activity will not only save human and material resources, but will also increase efficiency and effectiveness. It should create a legal and practical framework for communication, collaboration, and performance.

“Achieving preventive functions in cooperation with other authorities means that everybody perform prevention within its jurisdiction and with own methods of preventive action. For the purpose of more successful preventive action, it is necessary that this activity, in the form of elaborated and concrete tasks, finds a place in plans and programs of the organizational units of the police, but also in the periodic and annual reports in which their involvement in the prevention of environmental pollution should be expressed and analyzed” [Bošković 1993: 77-78]. The specificities of environmental crimes and violations determine in which direction and which way should cooperation be established, and how should the joint action of the police with specialized bodies that primarily deal with certain forms of environmental problems be done. What is especially important is the cooperation of the police and non-governmental organizations in protecting and improving the environment through prevention of environmental crime. This cooperation provides a wide range of joint actions. These organizations can inform the police about existing and upcoming environmental problems which can, as such, lead to the execution of various crimes and offences. Furthermore, these organizations can contribute through program activities in terms of raising awareness of citizens, as well as through concrete activities, such as: taking and storing samples to prove certain allegations (pollution, etc.), “whistleblower” against illegal activities, organizing workshops, expert meetings and round tables, providing support to citizens who are willing to testify, etc.

Although police can collect information by observing people, objects, phenomena and events, as well as using their operational connections, immediate contact and communication with ordinary citizens is irreplaceable, it should enable the exchange of information and intelligence, mutual assistance and joint action in various preventive programs against environmental crime. The established relationship between police and citizens should result in early warnings about environmental crime. Effective community policing against environmental crime requires “appropriate and timely response to diverse community behaviours” [Goldstein 1979: 242], which deteriorate and degrade the environment and can escalate into environmental crimes and violations. This points the importance of the active role of citizens in delivering real and timely information to the police. The mutual exchange of information, in relation to all occurrences and activities that can lead to problems that most often cause the appearance of crime, must be as intense as possible. The need to intensify the exchange of information with citizens additionally imposes certain characteristics of environmental crime like a large number of victims and a relatively harder to spotting perpetrators who are difficult to detect and prosecute as such. Smaller visibility of environmental crime is contributed by the fact that it is often not reported, which indicates a low

level of awareness citizens about this type of crime. Hence the opinion that the dark number of crime in this area is extremely high.

“Police data on traditional crime is very thorough and exhaustive and it accurately reflects a phenomenon, which is not the case with environmental crime. Because ecological crime is less visible, police officers who are not specialized in this area are usually not trained enough to recognize when and where this kind of crime occurs” [Geysels et al., 2013: 15]. All this additionally aggravates and complicates proactive preventive police action in this sphere of criminal activity.

Access to non-police sources is particularly important when it comes to this kind of crime [Geysels et al., 2013: 43]. It is necessary to increase the flow of information, especially in terms of quality and diversity, which the citizens will voluntarily provide to the police as a way of supporting its preventive plans, and it is often necessary to carry out targeted information collection. The precondition is that the police animate the community for active cooperation, which is mostly uninterested and doesn't have the ability, awareness nor the need, to observe suspicious activities and persons in their neighbourhood and to inform the police about it. This is even more important if one takes into account that any kind of crime is in question, and even ecologically, no matter how its activities were organized, secret or large, must begin and have their perpetrators and activities in the local community.

On the basis of such data, preventive and repressive activities can be planned, and necessary legal and organizational frameworks can be predicted for their realization, as well as material and human resources. An atmosphere in which “two-way communication channels” will function between police and citizens should be created [Leonard et al., 1993: 101]. The whole community must be interested and willing to cooperate with the police in the joint prevention of environmental crime. In this fight, the police must “look for associates, not informers” [Ristović 2015: 108].

It is necessary to create a coherent system of collecting and analyzing data related to environmental protection and environmental crime.

In the prevention of environmental crime, media has a significant place, because good relations with the media and clear rules that regulate mutual contacts increase the effectiveness of policing. Because of the sensitivity of these relationships, certain rules in mutual communication must be respected on how not to impair the freedom of the media, but also withhold information whose disclosure would jeopardize the police investigation or other confidential information of importance for the prevention and combating of environmental crime [Ristović 2016: 207].

The media greatly influences forming of public opinion, so it is expected of them to promote environmental protection and the fight against environmental crime. The media should provide free, objective and timely information to citizens on environmental issues, potential sources of environmental degradation, evident dangers that can lead to endangering human life and health, accidents, etc. In this way, its influence is raising the awareness of the citizens and the forming positive attitudes on environmental protection. Raising environmental awareness of citizens is important because “in the moment when people show an interest in environmental issues at an abstract level, looking for causes and solutions of existing environmental problems, opens the possibility of their participation in the recovery and prevention of environmental crisis” [Lilić i dr. 2010: 300].

The police use various modalities for achieving cooperation with the media, trying to gain media and citizens as partners in the prevention of environmental crime. E.g. printing various propaganda materials, such as posters, flyers, brochures, informers or newsletters. Recording shows, video clips, advertisements, as well as other information campaigns in newspapers, radio, television, internet popularize cooperation between police and citizens in the prevention of environmental crime and environmental protection. Such campaigns have a positive and mobilizing effect. Then, recording and showing films that contribute to the raise of public awareness, and which have different contents: e.g. about the observed environmental phenomena that can lead to the environmental pollution, then from the field of fire protection, on the dangers of radioactive, toxic and other harmful substances, transportation and storage of explosive materials, about the consequences and dangers of illegal hunting and fishing, cutting woods, etc.

Through the media, police officers can inform citizens about planned preventive programs, gain their attention and interest them to take part in specific measures and activities in the prevention of environmental crime.

## 7 CONCLUSION

The problem of environmental crime is big, and the current tendencies indicate that it will gain more and more complexity and actuality in time. Therefore, we need to think in advance, to upgrade existing ones and to create new answers which will be able to counter the challenges of environmental crime.

The concept of the community policing is, not only for the current, but even more for future activities, recognized as a paradigm which can give good results in fighting environmental crime.

Experiences say that partnerships between the police and community and problem oriented policing are successfully confronting environmental crime - its characteristics, its prevalence, its focus to the endangered resources, its bearers and participants.

The main issue for better results is the lack of police officers specialized in this type of crime, but also lack of awareness among police officers and citizens about the dangers of environmental pollution regardless of whether the consequences of such behaviour will manifest as an environmental crime. That's why priority is given to preventive programs that will contribute to raising awareness among citizens, as well as police officers, about environmental crime and its consequences for society and the environment.

The identified ways of countering environmental crime should be supported by the appropriate normative and educational framework, with the appropriate material and technical basis, thereby creating a suitable ambient for activities within the concept of community policing. Certainly, regarding the environmental issues, the scientific and professional public should be included.

Countering environmental crime must be systematically and institutionally arranged, accomplished and improved. In these endeavours, community policing should be part of a comprehensive, coherent strategy in the fight against crime, even in its most challenging, heavy organised forms, among which environmental crime is rapidly increasing.

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