

OMEGA Case Study

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Duluth Police Implement Landlord Notification Program

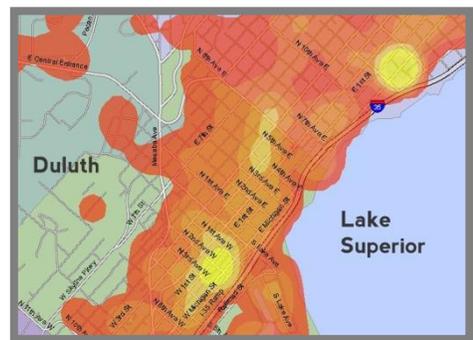
By Eugene Mueller



Communities with significant numbers of residential rental units and other non-owner occupied multi-unit housing are familiar with the fact that these locations are the source of frequent repeat calls to law enforcement to deal with a wide variety of criminal disturbances. For the City of Duluth, its stock of approximately sixteen thousand rental dwelling units translates into 40,000 to 50,000 calls for police service annually. This volume of calls requires direct landlord involvement to mitigate the inordinate demand for police response.

The Duluth Police implemented the Landlord Notification Program earlier this year in order to provide e-mail alerts to landlords of reported crime incidents at their properties so that they could take steps to prevent recurrences. This automated internal system is an adaptation of the Duluth Police's CrimeView®, a crime analysis technology information service provided by The Omega Group.

CrimeView® tracks crime incidents geographically by directly linking to crime incident data from the department's records system and presenting the incidents visually as icons on a map of the city to be viewed on a personal computer or portable communication device. CrimeView® sends e-mail alerts to property owners displaying the location and summary description of crime incidents at their properties when calls for service exceed the police department's designated minimum threshold. Since the system identifies the exact address of the location, the department has taken careful steps to limit the release of this information only to landlords.



Property owners and managers are able to exclusively enroll in the Landlord Notification Program by providing property identification information from their business rental license to the police which is cross checked and verified with the city's Building and Licensing Department to make sure they are the actual owners. Thereafter, the landlords receive a CrimeView® generated e-mail alert informing them of any crime incidents at their specific properties usually within 24 hours of occurrence. The landlords can then inquire with the tenants as to the circumstances of the incident and remind them that their lease agreement specifically includes a tenant obligation to reside crime free and drug free.

The landlords are very appreciative of this early warning system because it helps to avoid the fines and penalties that they are subject to when police are repeatedly called to respond to disturbances at their properties. As Chief of Police Gordon Ramsay explains, "The landlords want to be cooperative and to deal with any problem tenants. However, in the past, they complained that they were not made aware of the problems until the late stages only after receiving notice that the city was imposing fees or suspending their rental license. Unfortunately, this situation could not be avoided due to limited police officer resources and the high volume of disturbance calls at rental units. Now the landlords can know right away when there is a problem."



This improvement in the notification process has also enhanced the communication between landlords and police. In particular, the landlords are seeking out the advice of the community and neighborhood beat officers who are very experienced in managing problem rental dwellings for tips about how to deal with disruptive tenants. As Chief Ramsay explains, "The Landlord Notification Program is leading to very constructive dialog between officers and property owners which is one of the best benefits of the system."

The Duluth Police is now looking to build on the early success of the Landlord Notification Program by extending its application to other areas that necessitate early notification to stakeholders. Within the City of Duluth, there are a substantial number of supervised group homes for adults with mental and emotional disabilities. Private contractors manage these homes with oversight from the state's public social services agency. By including the addresses of these group homes into the Landlord Notification Program, the agency will be immediately notified of disturbances occurring there and more closely monitor the adequacy of the on-site facility management.

Chief Ramsay believes that the Landlord Notification Program enacted with CrimeView® is an excellent community-oriented approach to reducing chronic crime at residential rentals. Rather than just telling property owners that they need to be vigilant about monitoring their properties, the Landlord Notification Program gives them an easy way of doing it. The main task going forward for Duluth Police is simply to make sure that all property owners and landlords are aware of the program. As Chief Ramsay enthusiastically proclaims, "Among the landlords, there hasn't been a single one that has not shown any interest once aware of it and can't believe how quickly we can begin delivering information to them once enrolled."

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