



## The Atlantic City Police Department Risk-Based Policing Initiative Pilot Project

### Overview

This partnership between Rutgers University Center on Public Security (RCPS) and the Atlantic City Police Department (ACPD), with the Atlantic County Prosecutor's Office<sup>1</sup> and the City of Atlantic City, was initiated on October 15, 2015 and now continues through 2017. The one-time cost of the pilot project was originally paid for with forfeiture funds, and the continuation of this initiative will not cost taxpayers or city or county residents any extra money. The initial goals of this partnership were (1) to provide in-house training on Risk Terrain Modeling (RTM), geographic information systems (GIS), crime mapping, and spatial data management; (2) to establish data-driven, risk-based policing practices that inform decision-making and resource allocations; and (3) to effectively focus crime prevention and risk reduction efforts on places, not people.

The risk-based policing initiative began with a pilot project in 2016 to establish broad buy-in, collect data, and test the predictive validity of risk terrain modeling in Atlantic City, as well as to optimize the protocols and methods for data management, data access, and information communication within the police department, specifically, and the city and county, generally. Following the pilot project phase, the initiative continues with full implementation in 2017.

Risk-based policing is the operational mindset and practice of reducing and managing crime *risks* in order to prevent crime incidents over the long-term. It emphasizes problem solving, evidence-based decision-making, and sustainability. Risk-based policing uses Risk Terrain Modeling and ACTION Meetings to achieve this form of risk governance. RTM is a method of spatial risk analysis used to assess spatial patterns of crime and diagnoses how features of a landscape interact and overlap to create unique crime settings. With a diagnosis of the attractors of criminal behavior, RTM makes very accurate forecasts<sup>2</sup>.

### Progress

ACPD's Chief of Police and command staff spearheaded this initiative, with support and consultation by RCPS partners. Progress began immediately with a campaign to establish buy-in among all levels of ACPD personnel and multiple other city stakeholders, including city agency heads, business owners, faith-based leaders, and community groups. In sync with this effort to establish buy-in and support from multiple stakeholders, administrative data were collected to conduct analyses of robbery and shooting crimes, which were identified as the priority problems of interest for the pilot project.

Around January 1, 2016, risk terrain models were produced for robberies and shootings, using ACPD crime records obtained from the computer aided dispatch (CAD) and records management system (RMS), city administrative data, and InfoGroup<sup>3</sup> business address data. These data sets



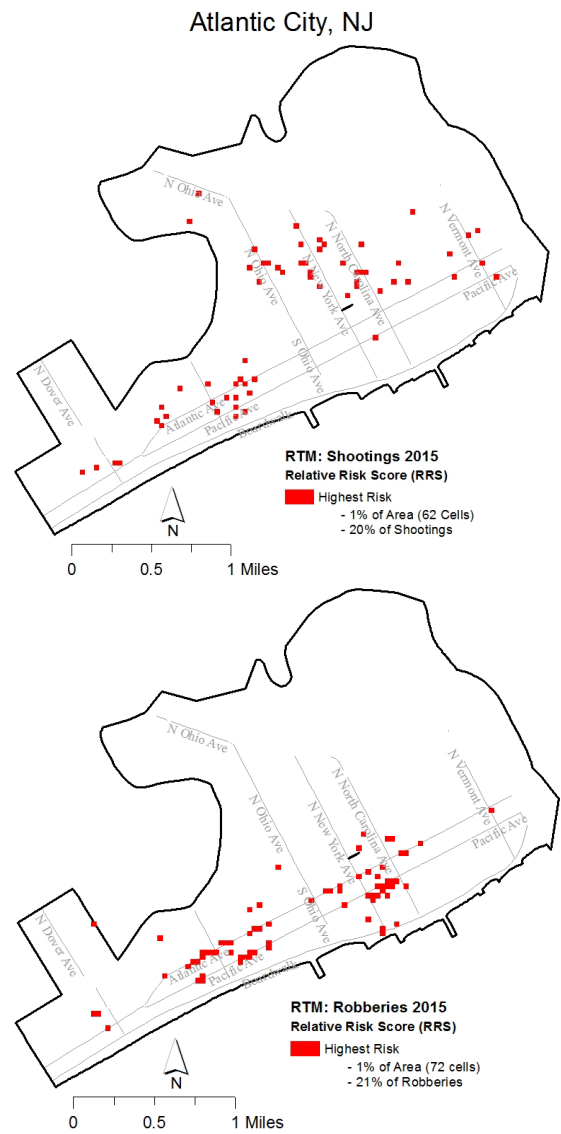
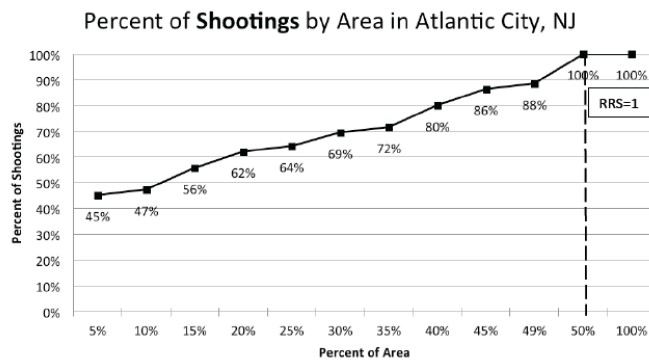
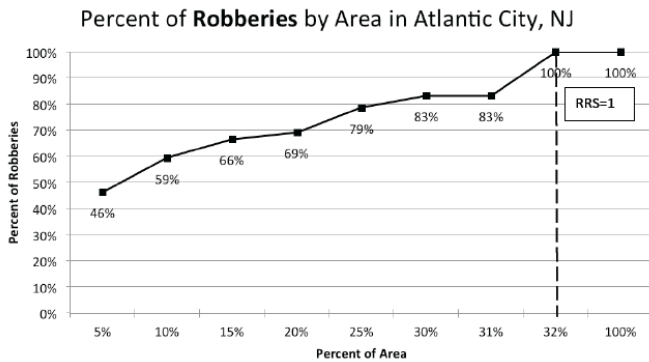
were representative of calendar year 2015. Risk terrain models were produced to forecast risky places for crime throughout 2016. The RTMDx Utility, developed by RCPS<sup>4</sup>, was used for this task. These analyses served as the basis for the pilot project to test the predictive validity of risk terrain modeling, and its practical value, in Atlantic City.

The significant environmental risk factors for robbery and shootings are shown in the tables (to the right). Convenience stores, laundromats, vacant properties and schools were identified as priority risk factors because they existed in both risk terrain models.

Highest-risk places were displayed in risk terrain maps. Pilot (or Phase 1) Target Areas were selected among the highest risk places for both crime types (by their overlap). They focused around just 10 blocks, totaling less than 1 square mile. As shown in the graphs below, the top 5% of highest-risk places for robberies and shootings were expected to host 46% and 45% of new crime incidents, respectively.

Robbery Risk Factors	OP	SI	RRV
Restaurants- ABC	Density	154 (half block)	5.1
Schools	Proximity	154	5.0
Hotels & Rooming Houses	Density	154	4.8
Convenient Stores	Proximity	154	3.6
Parking Lots	Density	154	3.4
Vacant Properties	Density	154	2.3
Spa & Massage Parlors	Proximity	924 (3 blocks)	2.2
Retail Clothing & Accessories	Proximity	924	2.1
Laundromats	Density	462 (1½ blocks)	2.0

Shooting Risk Factors	OP	SI	RRV
Laundromats	Density	154 (half block)	5.0
Residences of Parolees	Density	154	4.7
Vacant Properties	Density	154	4.5
Convenience Stores	Proximity	770 (2½ blocks)	4.1
Schools	Proximity	924 (3 blocks)	2.2



Police did not specifically intervene in the high-risk places or Phase 1 Target Areas during 2016. They operated as normal while the Chief and select commanders monitored the locations of new crime incidents, sprees or high-profile events, and their spatial and situational relationships to the designated target areas, other high-risk places, and risk factors.

The predictive accuracy of the risk terrain model exceeded expectations (based on empirical testing using the Predictive Accuracy Index, or PAI, methodology). Notably, the risk terrain model also identified “convenience stores” to be a major attractor of robberies nearly a full year prior to the eventual 2016 spree of convenience store robberies<sup>5</sup>. This helped to increase buy-in among (previously skeptical) police officers.

A risk analysis and resource deployment strategy for police and other stakeholders was developed based on pilot project findings, and will be implemented with the full commencement of the Risk-Based Policing Initiative in 2017. Priority areas and related risk reduction activities can and will be directly informed by the risk assessments. Adequate data management protocols are now in place to support and sustain the full initiative.

### **Sustainability and Community Engagement**

ACTION Meetings were scheduled regularly throughout 2016 to focus on Assessments, Connections, Tasks, Interventions, Otcomes and Notifications related to a variety of existing and emerging crime problems and threats in Atlantic City, and to discuss the risk-based policing initiative and related risk terrain models. Two types of ACTION Meetings occurred: 1) Police ACTION Meetings, and 2) Community ACTION Meetings.

The Police ACTION Meeting was comprised of ACPD officers and other policing leaders, including law enforcement or security-related partners who operate within the jurisdiction and who can be privy to sensitive intelligence for law-enforcement eyes only. Participants included ACPD’s Chief, Deputy Chief, Captains, Lieutenants (District Commanders), the homeless outreach officer, the public relations spokesperson, and the crime analyst, among others. This “police taskforce” strived to meet monthly to assess the risk terrain model’s predictions to-date and to propose ways to govern crime risks from law enforcement and policing perspectives. Consensus was reached on activities could be feasible and likely effective when the full initiative commences in 2017.

The Community ACTION Meetings were multi-stakeholder events, and comprised members of the police taskforce as well as city officials and other community leaders. This included, but was not limited to, representatives from the Mayor’s office and various city departments, such as Planning and Development, or Public Works; representatives of the mercantile associations, human and social service agencies, faith-based organizations, and local non-governmental organizations (e.g., NAACP, CRDA, neighborhood associations); school officials; business/store owners; and county and state executives. This “multi-stakeholder taskforce” assessed the risk-based policing initiative and proposed risk governance activities from a broad public perspective. Community ACTION Meetings were not open town hall style meetings where grievances (or compliments) get aired. They were invitation-only working meetings where risk assessments were shared and



groundtruthed, data were managed, and initiatives to reduce risks were proposed and committed to by various stakeholders.

To-date, buy-in and/or direct offers of support for the risk-based policing initiative was obtained from several community groups, non-profit organizations, businesses, and city officials. For instance, the Atlantic City Housing Authority will allocate necessary security measures at properties located in high-risk places. And the city's Planning and Development department will prioritize remediation of vacant properties and installations of new LED street lights at the highest-risk places.

At one ACTION Meeting, stakeholders derived from risk terrain modeling that shootings are probably connected to drug sales and related turf conflicts whereby 'convenience stores' are the places where drug buyers are solicited; nearby 'laundromats' are locations where drug transactions are made; and nearby 'vacant buildings' are used by drug dealers as stash houses for drugs and weapons, and by drug buyers to use drugs after purchase, or earn money through illicit means such as prostitution. When community stakeholders used the data-driven evidence to surmise that drugs, prostitution, retail businesses, and vacant properties are related in this way to shootings, they were more likely to agree with police on the probability of certain places to experience shooting incidents in the future and to decide what can be done to address the problem.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

Risk-based policing with RTM and ACTION proved to be transparent because analytical inputs are vetted by community stakeholders; analytical products are distributed for comment at ACTION Meetings; and, well-informed community stakeholders enthusiastically work with police to design risk reduction strategies. Challenging questions were posed to stakeholders at ACTION Meetings to ensure that the risk analysis and related intervention strategies would be acceptable in the context of police practices and community relations. All parties realized that their unique points of view could have value towards achieving the shared goal of public safety. Police still enforce the law and investigate crimes. But now community members have a clear and measurable role to play. When police share the burden of ensuring public safety with community stakeholders, these people become partners to help solve existing crime problems and to identify and address emerging public safety threats with activities that are likely to be effective, sustainable, and less susceptible to bias.

With wide-ranging buy-in, reliable and valid risk assessments methods, comprehensive target area selection and resource deployment plans, reliable data management procedures, and an established schedule for ACTION Meetings, the Risk-Based Policing Initiative is on track for full and effective implementation in 2017.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The original press release can be viewed at

[http://www.rutgerscps.org/uploads/2/7/3/7/27370595/news\\_release\\_acpd\\_rtm\\_action\\_implementation.pdf](http://www.rutgerscps.org/uploads/2/7/3/7/27370595/news_release_acpd_rtm_action_implementation.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> View short video introduction to RTM at [www.riskterrainmodeling.com](http://www.riskterrainmodeling.com) homepage

<sup>3</sup> InfoGroup is a data and marketing services company that provides detailed information about public entities, such as businesses and retail stores.

<sup>4</sup> [www.rutgerscps.org](http://www.rutgerscps.org)

<sup>5</sup> See the Press of Atlantic City news story: [http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/with-atlantic-city-store-robberies-on-the-rise-owners-and/article\\_42da9513-3d1b-59a8-b7d0-83462fef60de.html](http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/with-atlantic-city-store-robberies-on-the-rise-owners-and/article_42da9513-3d1b-59a8-b7d0-83462fef60de.html)

