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# **Patrol Vehicle Cruise Lights**

### Using patrol cruise lights to deter vehicle thefts and burglaries

Agency: Branford, Darien and New Canaan (Connecticut) Police Departments

Trial Duration: 09/01/17-12/31/17

**Pracademic\*:** Sergeant Jeremiah Johnson, PhD, Darien Police Department

#### Context

The practice of running cruise lights to increase police visibility dates back almost 15 years in the United States, but to date there have been no evaluations of its impact on crime or motor vehicle accidents.

#### Key Finding

There were fewer stolen vehicles, vehicle burglaries, arrests and motor vehicle accidents when cruise lights were on during patrols, but these differences did not reach statistical significance. There was a statistically significant reduction in the number of traffic stops.

\*BetaGov trains agency personnel to become research-savvy "Pracademics" who lead trials.

#### Background

Cruise lights are the static red and blue lights on a patrol vehicle, and may help reduce car crime by increasing awareness perception of law enforcement and presence. The lights draw the attention of drivers and pedestrians, serving both as a welcomed sign that help is nearby, and as a warning to would-be perpetrators that law enforcement is present. Operational use of cruise lights has diffused regionally in the United States, but to date there have been no external evaluations of its impact on crime. This trial attempts to test whether having police departments run patrol-vehicle cruise lights at night reduces crime.

#### **Trial Design**

In the police departments of three towns in Connecticut it was randomly determined each night if the shift's cruise lights would be on or off during patrol (both marked and unmarked vehicles). Special-purpose vehicles, such as for surveillance or reactive investigations, were excluded from the study. On intervention nights, patrol vehicles operated with cruise lights on during roaming and fixed patrol activities. On control nights, cruise lights remained off. The study was conducted over four months.

#### Results

There were 44% fewer vehicles stolen when patrol lights were on (10 compared with 18), 20% fewer arrests (20 compared with 25), 16% fewer vehicle burglaries (36 compared with 43) and 26% fewer vehicle accidents

(20 compared with 27) but these differences were not statistically significant. There were significantly fewer traffic stops with lights on than with lights off (428 compared with 489; p<0.05). The results of this pilot are promising and we look forward to replicating this approach and increasing the statistical power to detect differences.



## Why BetaGov?

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