



2009 Law Enforcement Study

To examine the impact of public skateparks from the local law-enforcement perspective, the Tony Hawk Foundation surveyed law-enforcement officers in communities where THF has contributed to the construction of a public skatepark. Each municipality included in this survey has had its skatepark open at least one year. In total, 102 officers in 37 states, from Oregon to New Hampshire, were interviewed.

The majority of law-enforcement officers consider their public skatepark a significant community asset. While almost half cited a *decrease* in overall youth crime since the skatepark opened, several officers mentioned the skatepark has *not* affected overall youth crime, and that the worsening economy is primarily to blame for an overall increase in crime in their towns.

Major issues at skateparks are rare. Helmet enforcement was the number-one issue reported at the skateparks, followed by graffiti and prohibited bike use. Many officers reported the skatepark's location as a factor in whether or not they considered it a success. Some attributed their park's success to highly visible locations, and several agree placing their skateparks next to other recreational activities has kept the park more visible and accessible.

The majority of law-enforcement officers surveyed believe the skatepark has been a positive addition to their community. Some officers reported that their departments are actually working with the skaters to improve the skateparks and to promote them in their communities. Only a few were pessimistic about their skateparks, and admitted to having a negative impression of skaters.

The following are some of the findings of the 2009 Tony Hawk Foundation Law Enforcement Study:

Skatepark Is A Community Asset

90% (92) of the officers surveyed believed the skatepark is an asset to the community. A common response from officers throughout the country was that providing kids somewhere to go and be active is always a positive thing. One officer in Maine stated, "The skaters are very respectful, and the skatepark has cut down on the youth crime, especially vandalism and kids skating on the sidewalks. The park gives the kids something to do, especially the 'at-risk' youth." Some officers (15) found centralizing the local youth in one area beneficial for their department as well as the local parents. "The skatepark is great," stated an officer from Wisconsin. "With the kids congregated in one spot, we can keep a better eye on them."

Fewer Complaints

85% (87) of officers stated that since the public skatepark opened in their community, their police/sheriff's department has noticed a significant decrease in complaint calls from business and property owners regarding skate-related incidents/crimes. The officers attributed this decrease to the

skaters' having a sanctioned place to skate, and no longer resorting to trespassing in order to practice their sport. "The skatepark has been a great thing," said an officer in Washington state. "Hundreds of complaint calls from businesses about the kids skating on their property have virtually been eliminated since the skatepark opened."

Some officers did not remember the last complaint call they received regarding a skate-related incident, and one Iowa officer attributed a lighter workload to the new local skatepark: "We used to have thick files of letters from businesses asking our department to issue trespassing charges to the skaters who were skating on their property. I don't know the last time I have received one of those letters since the park opened."

13% (14) of officers surveyed reported no noticeable change in skate-related calls/complaints since the skatepark opened. Three officers from that group believe the reason for it is the lack of challenges for the kids at the skatepark, or the skatepark being "old." Therefore, the skaters look elsewhere for new skate spots, often including prohibited areas.

Less than 1% (1) reported an increase in skate-related complaint calls to the department since the skatepark opened. But that officer attributed the increase to youth skating on private property and businesses on their way *to* the skatepark.

"The skatepark is very popular," said an officer in Montana. "It has taken issues that used to be very problematic (calls from local businesses complaining about kids skating on their property) and lessened them significantly."

Skatepark Is NOT A Magnet For Crime

91% (93) of officers surveyed reported no major issues, such as bad behavior or crime, at the skatepark. Of the remaining 9% (9) who reported major issues at the park, four (4) consider enforcing the helmet rule a major problem/issue for their department. The remaining officers who reported major issues (5) cited alcohol, drug use, fights, prohibited bike use (some skateparks prohibit use of BMX bikes) and graffiti as problems faced by their police force at the skatepark.

Some officers admit to taking a personal interest in resolving the issues they face, such as this officer in Washington state: "After the devastating death involving a local youth who wasn't wearing a helmet, we have established a helmet program and provide helmets free of charge for kids to use."

Another Washington-state officer, after noticing the older kids at the park unfairly "weeding out and bullying" the younger kids and not letting them skate, helped create a city ordinance that banned the intimidation of other skaters—violators would be kicked out of the skatepark for a year. One park in California had an incentive for kids taking ownership of the skatepark and keeping it clean—a program where kids earn "community services points" they can exchange for things like stickers, helmets, and skateboard equipment.

Visible Location Is Critical

15% (16) of officers surveyed cited the location as playing a major role in whether or not they experienced significant delinquency issues at their skatepark. Parks located in open, accessible, visible locations near other activities tend to be the least problematic. One officer in New Hampshire confirmed the location has eased his life: “The skatepark is used a lot—it’s an ideal location next to basketball fields and football fields, making it easy for parents, such as myself, to bring all of our kids to one spot and watch them—one plays football while the other is skateboarding.”

Skatepark Deters Youth Crime

47% (48) of officers noticed a decrease in overall youth crime since the skatepark opened. A common story shared by the officers was that giving youth something to do, and a place to go, decreases their chances of getting into trouble. A Sergeant from Massachusetts echoes this sentiment: “I can honestly say that, based on my 27 years of police work, if you can keep kids busy like the skatepark has done, you have completely prevented a future adult offender.”

49% (50) of officers reported no change to overall youth crime since the skatepark opened, and 4% (4) noticed an increase in overall youth crime since the skatepark opened. One officer attributed the increase in overall youth crime to growth of the general population. Another stated that, with the skatepark being so popular, many youth skip school to visit the park—thus increasing truancy and overall youth “crime.” One officer mentioned confining the kids in one area has actually generated more complaints regarding youth getting into trouble (fights, etc.). A few officers mentioned that with the worsening economy, there have been more crimes in all areas, thus making it difficult for a positive outlet like a skatepark to really show the effect it’s having on crime.

Skatepark is Common Ground

40% (41) of officers surveyed believe having a skatepark has had a positive impact on the relationship between law enforcement and local youth— “bridging the gap “ between them. Instead of writing tickets to the kids for skating in prohibited areas, they’d visit the kids at the skatepark, checking in on them and conversing, creating a positive situation. Of that group, (23) said that the skatepark provided a place where their officers can stop by, get out of their cars, and make a point of saying hi to the kids, thus bettering their relationships. “The skatepark has helped the relationship between the department and the kids tremendously,” said an officer in Missouri. “They’ve made friends.” Another officer in Texas mentioned, “Our officers frequent the park as part of their patrol, they chit-chat with the kids, check out the skate ‘stunts’ they do. It brings the force and kids closer together.”

Many officers were pleased that the skatepark provides a neutral territory for the two groups who once met in adversarial situations on the sidewalks and streets around town. “The relationship between the kids and our department has changed for the better since the skatepark opened,” an officer from Arizona stated. “It’s closed the gap between us. The kids now actually ask our officers for a ride to the skatepark, and we happily oblige.”

Another officer mentioned that the negative connotations associated with his department have lessened: “The kids now have a place to go, and our confrontations with them are less controversial. There are not as many bad contacts between us, like reprimanding the kids for skating in prohibited downtown.”

15% (16) of officers interviewed report that the skatepark has increased tourism to their towns. One department in Massachusetts has been actively involved in promoting the skatepark, and saw an increase in tourism in town. An officer in Indiana has seen similar results: “There are lots of out-of-town people visiting the park, from as far away as Michigan, Ohio, and Canada, thus increasing our tourism.”

One officer said members of his department regularly attend meetings to resolve the helmet issue at their skatepark. In a small town in Montana, officers hand out ice-cream coupons to kids who wear helmets at the skatepark, and in another town in Wisconsin, the police force is planning a skate contest with the local Parks and Recreation department.

The results of this study show that a majority of law-enforcement officers surveyed believe their public skatepark is a community asset, keeping the youth healthy, active, and away from the traffic on streets and sidewalks. Almost half of the officers interviewed reported a reduction in overall youth crime since their skatepark opened, with a significant decrease in skate-related trespassing contributing to that figure.

Populations of communities included in this survey (102 total):
<i>57: Fewer than 10,000 residents</i>
<i>14: 10,001–20,000 residents</i>
<i>11: 20,001–30,000 residents</i>
<i>4: 30,001–40,000 residents</i>
<i>3: 40,001–50,000 residents</i>
<i>3: 50,001–60,000 residents</i>
<i>0: 60,001–70,000 residents</i>
<i>3: 70,001–80,000 residents</i>
<i>1: 80,001–90,000 residents</i>
<i>1: 90,001–100,000 residents</i>
<i>4: 100,001–200,000 residents</i>
<i>1: 200,001–300,000 residents</i>