

## GIS Prevents Crime and Increases Public Confidence

Richland County, Ohio



Case Study:  
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Richland County, Ohio

Law enforcement experts everywhere know one factor stands head and shoulders above all others in its ability to prevent crime and increase public confidence: police visibility.

But how can public safety agencies decide where to concentrate their scarce resources?

The Richland County, Ohio, Sheriff's Department doesn't have a crystal ball, but it does have the next best thing—LGcrimes™. One glance at a detailed map tells officers and citizens exactly where crime is more prevalent and where officers need to be assigned.

**Background:** Over the years this north central Ohio location has become a favorite venue for Hollywood to film prison scenes. In fact, if you have ever seen the Shawshank Redemption, or Air Force One, you've visited Richland County. It's the home of America's largest freestanding cell-block prison, abandoned years ago.

In truth, however, Richland County is safe, peaceful and family-oriented. The Sheriff's Department works hard to protect its citizens and involve its officers in community life.

Sheriff James Stierhoff includes community commitment in his department's mission statement, and deploys his entire force of 40 sworn officers in community policing.

Officers credit their success in protecting their 127,000 citizens in large part to effective planning, which begins with reliable, easily understood data.

LGcrimes gives law enforcement officials a powerful tool to integrate crime data with Geographic Information System (GIS) software. The result is a clear, accurate graphical presentation of complex layers of information. When officers see a map with such details as known offenders' addresses, landmarks, police jurisdictions and criminal activity statistics, trends and patterns begin to emerge.

As soon as an incident is logged into the CRIMES database, it's available to LGcrimes. Operators can request a list of crimes by beat, neighborhood, near a landmark or intersection, within a jurisdiction or by any other user-defined area.

Other GIS layers, such as school zones, bike trails, railroads, plots and parcels, stop signs and speed limit signs can be incorporated into the map request.



"It's a very impressive product," said Sherri Heyde, IT Manager for the Sheriff's Department. "It makes complicated reports very easy to explain, especially to citizens. As more people see it, we get more and more requests to use it."

Heyde said she and her co-workers have found two high-profile uses for LGcrimes already.

The first came when the Sheriff's Department needed to notify all citizens living within 1000 feet of a registered sexual predator, a requirement of Ohio's newly enacted Megan's Law.

"I had no idea how to find those citizens' names, based on a geographic boundary," Heyde said. "And without LGcrimes, I still don't know how I would do it. But all I had to do was ask for all addresses within the specified boundary, and the residents' names came right up. I was then able to transfer that into another program to generate mailing labels, and I was home free."

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Deputies have also found the application very useful in their involvement in Neighborhood Watch meetings throughout the jurisdiction.

“Each month department representatives meet with neighborhood groups to discuss crime prevention and since we’ve had LGcrimes, they’ve been able to take maps of the areas they are covering, with information on criminal activity for the previous month. It’s much easier for the deputies to explain to citizens what’s going on when they have the map right there, and people are always impressed with the level of detail we have,” Heyde said.

“It’s a great way to build confidence in our department. The citizens know we’re on top of things, and that we have the most advanced technology available. These are things people might expect to find only in large cities, but we’re proud that we have them here.”

With the help of technology such as LGcrimes, Richland County citizens don’t just feel safer, they are safer. And for Sheriff Stierhoff and his deputies, Geographic Technologies Group brings them one step closer to their goal of being in the right place at the right time to make Richland County a safer place.

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Geographic Technologies Group  
1202 Parkway Drive  
Goldsboro, NC 27534  
Phone: 1.888.757.4222  
Fax: 919.759.0410  
E-mail: [info@geotg.com](mailto:info@geotg.com)