

# How offenders work (modus operandi)

Common methods of procedure for residential burglaries and ways to address them.

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Forces are encouraged to submit data about offender methods of procedure – also known as modus operandi (MO) – to [Opal](#) for analysis. Forces can access this analysis to develop local intelligence about offenders who may cross force or regional boundaries. This will help to identify patterns, trends and potentially enable offences to be linked.

Common MOs are distraction burglary, doorstep crime and burglary-related vehicle theft. They include the following tactics.

## Distraction burglary and doorstep crime

Distraction burglaries and doorstep crimes – for example, fraudulent tradesmen or salesmen – may be committed by individuals or criminal groups.

Enforcement and prevention plans should be developed in partnership with other enforcement agencies, such as Trading Standards, to target all doorstep crimes.

Victims of distraction burglaries or doorstep crime are often elderly or vulnerable.

Because of the repeated nature of the offending, these offences can result in substantial loss of property, including people's life savings. The impact of these offences can be significant, leading to loss of self-confidence, illness and sometimes death.

## Prevention

Where these crimes happen, public awareness campaigns should be undertaken to protect vulnerable people in the community. Partnership working with organisations such as Meals on Wheels or Age UK should be considered.

Where Neighbourhood Watch schemes are in place, distraction burglary alert cards could be used. Police community support officers (PCSOs) who are effectively briefed can also provide visible reassurance.

## Effective response

Forces should consider:

- aide-memoires for police officers outlining key legislation, such as the Theft Act 1968 and Consumer Protection Act 1987
- early liaison with Trading Standards to ensure that the most appropriate offences are investigated
- crime prevention strategies in consultation with partners that highlight prevention tactics – such as [nominated neighbour schemes](#), infrared door chain reminders and memo cams – to prevent or respond to repeat victimisation

Trading Standards has a range of powers to investigate and prosecute relevant offences.

## Burglary-related vehicle theft

For burglary offences involving stolen vehicles, it's useful to map where stolen vehicles are abandoned or recovered, including postcode or grid reference. (For example, where the burglary was a means of obtaining car keys.)

This may help to identify locations where vehicles are dismantled or processed for onward transmission – for example, for export to other countries.

If analysis shows that an area is being targeted for a particular type of vehicle, the vehicle online descriptive searching (VODS) facility in the Police National Computer (PNC) can use postcodes to identify the type of vehicle. This enables crime prevention letters to be sent to registered owners.

## Prevention

Forces should also consider the following.

- Community information campaigns via local and social media. For example, working with community and independent advisory groups to run parish or community meetings, and develop publications and community messaging in different languages containing clear crime prevention advice. See also [Crime reduction initiatives](#).
- Identify and target vulnerable vehicles using VODS and local dealers, and then post crime prevention advice to registered keepers.

- Carry out crime prevention campaigns in outlets such as supermarkets, using television, posters, leaflets, and physical police presence if appropriate. See also [Crime reduction initiatives](#).

## Tags

Neighbourhood policing   Investigation   Crime reduction