Abstract

This research explores application of the “broken windows” theory of public disorder and urban decline to the pattern and problem of police officer fatalities in motor vehicle crashes. It contextualizes the influential theory into a 45-year timeline of significant events related to legislative efforts and traffic safety behavioral safety programs in the United States. It finds one police agency that reported fewer crimes and fewer crashes after implementing a community-wide Safe Streets program designed around “broken windows” theory in 1997. It pays particular attention to states with the highest percentages of law enforcement officer fatalities in motor vehicle crashes, primary and secondary safety belt laws, laws banning cell phone use, and characteristics of police fatalities reported in a January 2011 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration report. Preliminary findings validate current academic research suggesting more police-researcher partnerships are necessary to improve police practices.