

SAFETY DIAGNOSIS
TOOL KIT FOR LOCAL
COMMUNITIES

Guide to Direct Observation of Community Safety

[charting a course › to safe living]
vol. 12

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*Institut national
de santé publique*

Québec 

In cooperation with:

• Ministère de la Sécurité publique

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The [charting a course › to safe living] collection

This document is part of a collection prepared to foster and support safety promotion in life settings. Volumes 4 to 13 are the main components of a safety diagnosis tool kit developed for local communities. To date, the following volumes have been compiled for this collection:

Volume 1

Levaque, Renée, Laurence Le Hénaff and Pierre Maurice. *Formation pour l'amélioration de la sécurité et la prévention de la criminalité à l'intention des collectivités locales*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2006.

Volume 2

Alvarez, Josephina. *Réalisation d'un diagnostic de sécurité. Trousse à l'intention des collectivités locales – Les diagnostics locaux de sécurité : une étude comparée pour mieux comprendre et mieux agir*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2006.

Volume 3

Laforest, Julie. *Indicateurs de vulnérabilité associés à la sécurité d'un territoire*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2007.

Volume 4

Rainville, Monique, Louise Marie Bouchard and Pierre Maurice. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. General Guide*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

Volume 5

Rochette, Daniel, Robert Lavertue and Louise Marie Bouchard. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Preparing an Area's Sociodemographic and Economic Profile*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

Volume 6

Motard, Louise. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Analyzing Crime Using Official Statistics*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

Volume 7

Bouchard, Louise Marie. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Organizing Telephone Surveys on Public Safety and Victimization in Life Settings*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

Volume 8

Bouchard Louise Marie and Michel Ouellet. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Organizing Self-Administered Surveys on Public Safety and Victimization in Life Settings*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

Volume 9

Bouchard Louise Marie and Michel Ouellet. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Organizing Self-Administered Surveys on Public Safety and Victimization in Life Settings (Social Housing Version)*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, to be published in March 2010.

Volume 10

Rainville, Monique. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Organizing Focus Groups*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2009.

Volume 11

Laforest, Julie. *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Organizing Semi-Structured Interviews With Key Informants*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2009.

Volume 12

Ouellet, Michel, Monique Rainville, Louise Marie Bouchard and Catherine Belley, *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities. Guide to Direct Observation of Community Safety*, Québec, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2009.

Note to readers

There are at least two methods for gaining a first-hand understanding of the situation in a community: direct observation and exploratory walks.¹ Direct observation involves studying the community in order to identify characteristics or situations with nuisance potential (disorderly conduct, incivility, deteriorated physical environment, etc.), while exploratory walks are aimed at assessing urban environments (neighbourhood units, streets, blocks, etc.) from the standpoint of users. The main purpose of such walks is to determine how a given environment affects the population's feeling of safety and to gauge the extent to which people feel they are at risk of being assaulted. Exploratory walks are designed to establish whether the environment's characteristics enable people to know where they are and where they are going, to see and to be seen, to hear and to be heard, and so forth.

The present guide, which is part of the *Safety Diagnosis Tool Kit for Local Communities*, discusses the first method: direct community observation. It is intended to provide a framework for gathering meaningful information that will lead to a better understanding of problems noted, especially by the population, in various private or public places: for example, around high-density family housing, around shopping centres or districts and around bars or other establishments that serve alcohol.

In this guide, the terms site, place and life setting all refer to areas where observation sessions will be carried out.

Sources

The content of sections “Direct observation – A general overview” and “Direct observation – An in-depth look” was adapted from an electronic document put out by the Walloon Region of Belgium. Since this document was housed on a site that has not been accessible since 2008, readers who wish to obtain a copy are invited to contact the authors (see the “Contact Us” page on the CRPSPC Web site): http://www.crpssp.qc.ca/default_an.asp?fichier=joindre_an.asp

The content of the section “Organizing direct community observation – Aide-mémoire” is based on the following document:
[http://www.integration-projects.org/tools/Methodologie_du_focus_group_FR.doc].

1. To learn more about exploratory walks, consult the following documents:

- *Guide de réalisation d'une marche exploratoire : carnet d'enquête*, Ville de Lévis, [http://www.ville.levis.qc.ca/Fr/Pdf/GuideEnquete_marche_exploratoire.pdf], p. 5.
- *La marche exploratoire... Une façon simple d'améliorer la sécurité dans votre milieu*, Ville de Québec [http://www.ville.quebec.qc.ca/publications/docs_ville/guide_marche_exploratoire.pdf].
- *City of Toronto: Safety Audits Home* [<http://www.toronto.ca/safetyaudits/index.htm>]: an exploratory-walk-type tool is available at http://www.toronto.ca/safetyaudits/pdf/scarb_safety_checklist.pdf

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Organization of the guide

1

GENERAL OVERVIEW

The first section of this guide briefly describes

the nature and usefulness of direct observation as a

method for collecting data for safety diagnoses.

2

STEPS INVOLVED

The second section discusses

the steps involved in planning and conducting

observation sessions and provides guidelines

for summarizing the data gathered.

3

AIDE-MÉMOIRE

The third and fourth sections contain, respectively, an aide-mémoire

and additional

reference documents.

4

REFERENCES

Observation tools such as an observation log

and an observation summary sheet are found

at the end of the guide.

#

OBSERVATION TOOLS

Direct observation – A general overview

1 GENERAL OVERVIEW

In making safety diagnoses, it is sometimes hard to estimate or quantify certain factors that must be taken into account, such as disorderly conduct, nuisances or characteristics of the physical and social environment (see Appendix 2 for a definition of these terms). Direct observation is an efficient way of gathering information on these factors. It involves capturing first-hand various situations in a community as they occur and assessing their importance.

In particular, it consists in examining a series of events, situations or environmental features using an observation log based on the characteristics or behaviour of people (e.g. drug use in parks) or on certain aspects of the physical environment (e.g. number of abandoned or vandalized buildings in a given area). The observation log outlines what should be observed.

Even though it is difficult to enumerate all situations that have nuisance potential, a certain number can be identified on the basis of the scientific literature:

- aggressive or annoying behaviour by itinerant or homeless people;
- congregation of young people or adults who engage in annoying behaviour (disturbing the peace, intimidation, etc.);
- inappropriate or intimidating behaviour by certain individuals;
- community repercussions of drug dealing or use;
- community repercussions of prostitution activities;
- lack of cleanliness in certain areas (presence of litter, syringes, pieces of glass, etc.);
- graffiti on buildings or equipment;
- other signs of vandalism on buildings or equipment (bus shelters, benches, play equipment, telephone booths, streetlights, etc.);
- other signs of vandalism in outdoor public spaces (on trees, landscaping, etc.);
- abandoned or dilapidated buildings;
- poor or defective lighting (broken or out-of-service lights) in public places.

These 11 situations have been incorporated into the tools proposed in this guide. The first 10 are considered signs of disorderly conduct or nuisances (Appendix 2), while the eleventh is related to the quality of lighting.²

2. J.E. Eck (2002), "Preventing crime at places", in L.W. Sherman, D.P. Farrington, B.C. Welsh and D.L. MacKenzie (eds.), *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*, Routledge, London, p. 270-273.

WHEN SHOULD DIRECT OBSERVATION BE USED?

- When it is necessary to gather information that is difficult or impossible to derive from databanks or the population.
- When it is necessary to complete, refine or validate administrative or statistical data or information obtained through surveys and focus groups.
- When the goal is to obtain more explicit or more meaningful information through concrete examples captured in the field.
- When the goal is to gather data on the physical state of a site and the nuisances found there by taking into account the characteristics and use of its built environment.

Direct observation – An in-depth look

This section discusses how to plan and conduct observations and summarize the data gathered on individual sites and groups of sites.

PLANNING OBSERVATIONS

The success of observation activities in a community depends partly on the quality of the preparation phase. The following topics should be discussed to facilitate planning:

- observation objectives;
- identification and location of observation sites;
- number and timing of observation sessions;
- length of sessions and the observation phase as a whole;
- necessary resources;
- selection of observers;
- site access and photography;
- itinerary;
- data collection log and observer instructions.

Observation objectives

The objectives of observation activities must be decided beforehand. The following list of four possible goals may be used to guide reflection in this regard:

- identify situations involving disorderly conduct or nuisances that can be observed in a community;
- refine or validate data derived from surveys or focus groups;
- take stock of situations that cannot be documented in any other way;
- assess the state or use of certain places (e.g. deterioration of a park or the behaviour of its various users).

Identification and location of observation sites

Sites that are to be studied should be identified in advance. If necessary, a reconnaissance tour can be conducted of the community concerned to gain a better idea of what sites should be included in the observation project.



Two strategies can be applied to determine which sites should be observed. The first involves consulting the scientific literature of the past 20 years to identify places that are most likely to pose safety problems within a particular area. Authors have noted that 60% of crimes in the United States occur in barely 10% of the built environment.³ The places mentioned most frequently are:^{4,5}

- high-density multi-family housing;
- shopping centres or districts;
- bars or other establishments that serve alcohol;
- public transit;
- parking lots;
- public places such as parks;
- public places with poor lighting;
- areas around high schools.

The other strategy involves analyzing information derived from focus groups, interviews with key informants or surveys or consulting administrative data.

Number and timing of observation sessions

It is a good idea to plan on holding more than one observation session on each site, at different times of the day or week. Some problems manifest themselves only at certain times of the year and this must be taken into account in planning the sessions.

A survey of the site or a quick tour of the sector where it is located can make it easier to estimate the number of observation sessions required and when they should be held.

Length of sessions and the observation phase as a whole

Observation sessions can last from one hour to two and a half hours. The most important thing to consider in deciding how long they should be is available resources. The optimum length of sessions depends on the site being observed and the objectives pursued. For example, it can vary according to whether the main focus is the physical environment or the different uses of a site. In the latter case, sessions should last longer as the phenomena to be observed are not always present.

3. W. Spelman and J.E. Eck (1989). "Sitting ducks, ravenous wolves and helping hands: New approaches to urban policing," *Public Affairs Comments*, 35(2), 1-9, cited by J.E. Eck (2002), "Preventing crime at places," in L.W. Sherman, D.P. Farrington, B.C. Welsh and D.L. MacKenzie (eds.), *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*, Routledge, London, p. 242.

4. J. Laforest (2007). *Indicateurs de vulnérabilité associés à la sécurité d'un territoire*, Institut national de santé publique du Québec, Québec, 79 pages.

5. Idem (2002), p. 241-294.

Under optimal conditions, the most useful concept for defining the length and scope of the observation phase is "data saturation", or the point where information gathered is repetitive or does not provide any new or additional insights. Once data is saturated, the observation phase is complete.

Necessary resources

Observation does not require a large amount of human and material resources. Projects must provide for:

- one or more observers on each observation site;
- one or more observation logs adapted to the objectives pursued (see sample observation log at the end of this document);
- paper, pencils and some form of rigid support (e.g. book or small board) for taking notes;
- sufficient time for making observations;
- a list of instructions for observers;
- photographic equipment, if necessary (see "Taking photographs in public places" in Appendix 1).

Selection of observers

Observation requires a good memory and attention to detail. In addition, observers must have a good understanding of what they observe, be rigorous and be open enough to not reject certain observations too quickly. To enhance the quality of observations, at least two observers should be assigned to each site.

There is no easy answer to the question of whether observers should be well-acquainted with the community to be observed. A person who already knows a community well can begin the observation process more quickly. On the other hand, it may be harder for him/her to have the detachment and objectivity needed to be an effective observer. Observers can be recruited from among the paid employees of a municipality (e.g. park warden), volunteer citizens (e.g. the members of a golden age group) or the members of a safety committee.

Site access and photography

Generally speaking, access to sites should not be a problem. When sites to be observed are public places or private places used by the public, it is a good idea to inform the appropriate authorities about the kind of observations that will be made.

Taking photographs in private places used by the general public, such as shopping centres or parking lots, requires the authorization of the owners or the people in charge of these places. Moreover, under Québec law, people cannot be photographed without their consent. Therefore, photographs should be taken in limited numbers, bearing in mind the use to which they will be put (e.g. if and how they will be disseminated) and respecting the private character of the places and buildings to be photographed (see "Taking photographs in public places" in Appendix 1).

Itinerary

Some of the situations to be observed probably require observers to move from one site to another. The extent to which they have to move depends on the objectives pursued and the size of the area under study. For example, if the goal is to observe night-time lighting in a municipality's public places, observers have to visit each of these places. The route they are to follow should be determined in advance, and a decision should be made, based on the area's size and the accessibility of sites, as to whether they will travel on foot or by car. When cars are used, observers may take some time to walk around the various sites in order to enhance the accuracy of their observations.

Data collection log and observer instructions

One of the problems observers often face is how to effectively zero in on what should be observed. Therefore, it is important to provide them with a standard observation log that will serve as a guide and help them to take notes. A sample observation log is provided at the end of this document. It can be used as is or as a model for developing other logs that are better adapted to specific contexts. It is important to note, however, that the log given here should not be reserved solely for taking notes on the situations mentioned in it. Therefore, it is important to provide observers with have enough room for recording observations on other situations they deem pertinent.

Prior to conducting their observations, observers must have time to familiarize themselves with the observation log that is to be used during the sessions. It is recommended that a list of instructions be prepared for observers, particularly to indicate what attitudes they should adopt while observing sites and to summarize how they should record the data in the log. These instructions will ensure a degree of consistency in the way the different observers gather information.

Observers must also be made aware of the ethical issues raised by observation activities and the situations they may encounter along the way. The confidentiality of information collected and the reporting of offences are some of the topics that should be discussed with future observers. Appendix 1 discusses the ethical considerations related to data collection.

CONDUCTING OBSERVATIONS

Certain principles must be adhered to during observation sessions. In particular, observers must:

- adapt to the community under study by building and maintaining a climate of trust when necessary with the users of the sites to be observed;
- adopt a neutral attitude and interfere as little as possible in situations and conversations;
- watch how events unfold;
- record their observations.

To avoid negative perceptions, it is sometimes advisable for observers to explain why they are present and how the observation sessions will proceed. In addition, it is important they guarantee that people's anonymity will be respected (see Appendix 1, "Ethical considerations").

In the field, each observer must record his/her observations as situations occur and assess the frequency and seriousness of the consequences of these situations (see sample observation log). He/she may have to count events, that is, the number of times certain behaviours or acts occur, and highlight variations in their frequency on individual sites or from one site to another. Observers have to fill out a new log for each observation session on a site.

At the end of each session, observers must take time to reflect on what they have observed and record their thoughts and conclusions.

SUMMARIZING OBSERVATIONS

After the observation sessions, an observation summary sheet has to be prepared. To that end, observers must determine the relative importance of each situation observed and enter the observations that best describe the most important situations on the summary sheet.

Preparing summary sheets is essential and must be done shortly after the data have been collected. For this purpose, observers take part in a discussion period in order to validate the information gathered and to qualify their observations.

Where applicable, the summary sheets are submitted to a safety committee. If the observation exercise is part of a safety diagnosis, the observations on situations with the greatest nuisance potential are incorporated with all the other important observations compiled for the diagnosis. To learn more about the processing and analysis of this type of data, consult the *General Guide*.

Direct observation of community safety: Aide-Mémoire

Activity	Content	Proposed time frame
Plan observation sessions.	Consult the "Planning" section and, if necessary, adapt the sample observation log or design a new one.	6 weeks before the sessions
Become acquainted with the sites selected.	Explore the sites selected and record information that will be useful for planning the observation sessions.	6 weeks beforehand
Obtain authorization (if necessary).	Meet with the owner or the person in charge of the site to explain what the observation sessions will involve and to obtain the necessary approval.	5 weeks beforehand
Prepare the list of instructions that will be given to observers.	Indicate what attitude the observers should adopt in observing sites and explain how to fill in the observation log, take additional notes, etc.	5 weeks beforehand
Choose one or more observers.	Identify which people are most likely to be effective observers and contact them.	5 weeks beforehand
Submit the observation log to the observers.⁶	Make sure the observers understand the log and how to fill it in. Discuss the ethical aspects of observation.	3-4 weeks beforehand
Divide up the sites among the observers and prepare an observation schedule.		3-4 weeks beforehand
Organize the logistics.	Car pooling, meeting places, note-taking material.	2 weeks beforehand
Remind the observers.		1 week beforehand
Hold the observation sessions.	Suggested length: one hour to two and a half hours.	
Have the observers pool their observations and fill out a summary sheet for each site.	Obtain a consensus among the observers on the relative importance of the various situations observed and have them write down their observations on the most important situations.	As soon as possible
Send a letter or word of thanks to the observers.		Within a week of the observation sessions

6. If the observation log is used for purposes other than a safety diagnosis, it must be adapted to the topics being studied.

To learn more about direct community observation



Laperrière, Anne (1993). "L'observation directe," in *Recherche sociale. De la problématique à la collecte des données*, authors' collective under the direction of Benoît Gauthier, 2nd edition, Presses de l'Université du Québec, p. 251-272.



Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (2006). *Evaluating Crime Prevention through Social Development Projects. Handbook for Community Groups* [http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/_fl/Evaluation_handbook-E.pdf], Module 4, p. 79-80.



Observation tools

Observation log

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

A sample observation log has been prepared to facilitate the job of observers. It may be used as is or adapted, or be taken as a model for designing a new log. The log has several pages, printed on both sides, with plenty of room for taking notes.

Identification

At the beginning of the log is a section where observers can identify the site on which the observations were made, as well as the time and length of the observation session. It is also recommended that observers indicate the time of day and the day of the week the observations were conducted.

Situations to be observed

In the log, observers must describe the situations they witnessed in terms of their "observed frequency" and the "seriousness of their consequences". Obviously, the list of situations proposed in the log is not exhaustive. Therefore, space is provided at the end for reporting other situations that may pose safety problems in the area under study.

Observers may find that they do not have enough room in the log for recording all of their observations. Consequently, they must be provided with additional paper and a rigid support, such as a book or a small board, for taking notes.

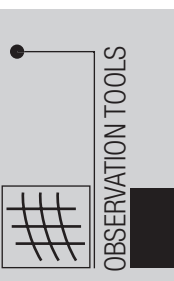
Observed frequency

Although it is desirable for observers to assess the frequency of a situation based on what they observe, some situations do not lend themselves very well to simple frequency counts. This is why the log presented in the guide suggests that frequency be considered in qualitative terms. In other words, observers can simply say that they observed the situation under study rarely or very rarely, often or very often.

A box is provided in the log for indicating the frequency rating for each of the situations proposed. The rating key is as follows:

- ∅ No situation of this type observed
- Situation observed rarely or very rarely
- Situation observed often
- Situation observed very often
- NA Not applicable

Each observer is responsible for defining his/her frequency criteria. Ideally, the criteria should be discussed by the project team or by the observers as a whole before the observation sessions begin or, at the very least, when the observations are being summarized after the sessions.



Seriousness of consequences

The importance of a problem situation does not depend solely on its frequency. It is also related to the seriousness of the consequences the problem entails or the risk it poses for public safety. Therefore, observers are asked to give their opinion on the seriousness of the consequences associated with each of the situations observed. Observation activities are thus enriched by reflection on and assessment of these situations.

Seriousness of consequences refers to the negative impact of situations on public safety and to the nuisances they engender. It is important to note that the consequences of a problem situation may be influenced by its frequency. For example, a single piece of litter on a sidewalk is not a very serious problem, whereas a pile of garbage on a public road could affect people's safety by leading to falls, foul odours, insalubrity, a bad neighbourhood image, and so forth. At all times, it must be borne in mind that observers may have different perceptions of the seriousness of consequences. Observers can reach a consensus in this regard when they pool their observations and thoughts.

The observation log is available in MS Word format on the Web site of the Québec Safety Promotion and Crime Prevention Centre / Centre québécois de ressources en promotion de la sécurité et en prévention de la criminalité (www.crpspc.qc.ca) at:
http://www.crpspc.qc.ca/default_an.asp?fichier=outils_diagnostic_an.htm

SITE SAFETY OBSERVATION LOG

Sector name or number
Date of observation session
Site location or address
Name of observer
Length of observation session

Time of day

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| ☐ Morning | ☐ Afternoon | ☐ Evening | | |
| ☐ Monday | ☐ Tuesday | ☐ Wednesday | ☐ Thursday | ☐ Friday |
| ☐ Saturday | ☐ Sunday | | | |

Number of items observed

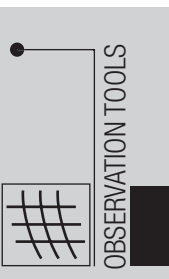
(where applicable, count and enter the number of items observed)

Rating scale for the frequency of the situation observed

- ∅ No situation of this type observed
- Situation observed rarely or very rarely
- Situation observed often
- Situation observed very often
- NA Not applicable

Rating scale for the perceived seriousness of the situation's consequences

- ∅ No serious consequences
- Not very serious consequences
- Serious consequences
- Very serious consequences
- NA Not applicable



Checklist of situations to be observed

Situations with nuisance potential

A	<i>Aggressive or annoying behaviour by itinerant or homeless people.</i>
B	<i>Congregation of young people or adults who engage in annoying behaviour (disturbing the peace, intimidation, etc.).</i>
C	<i>Inappropriate or intimidating behaviour by certain individuals.</i>
D	<i>Community repercussions of drug dealing or use.</i>
E	<i>Community repercussions of prostitution activities.</i>
F	<i>Lack of cleanliness in certain areas (presence of litter, syringes, pieces of glass, etc.).</i>
G	<i>Graffiti on buildings or equipment.</i>
H	<i>Other signs of vandalism on buildings or equipment (bus shelters, benches, play equipment, telephone booths, streetlights etc.).</i>
I	<i>Other signs of vandalism in outdoor public spaces (on trees, landscaping, etc.).</i>
J	<i>Abandoned or dilapidated buildings.</i>
K	<i>Poor or defective lighting (broken or out-of-service lights) in public places.</i>

Other situations observed:

OBSERVATION NOTES

A. Aggressive or annoying behaviour by itinerant or homeless people.

Number of items observed (optional)	Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

B. *Congregation of young people or adults who engage in annoying behaviour (disturbing the peace, intimidation, etc.).*

Number of items observed (optional)		Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
▶	◀	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

C. *Inappropriate or intimidating behaviour by certain individuals.*

Number of items observed (optional)	Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

D. *Community repercussions of drug dealing or use.*

Number of items observed (optional)	Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

E. *Community repercussions of prostitution activities.*

Number of items observed (optional)		Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
		∅	•	••	•••	NA	∅	•	••	•••	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

F. *Lack of cleanliness in certain areas (presence of litter, syringes, pieces of glass, etc.).*

Number of items observed (optional)	Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

G. *Graffiti on buildings or equipment.*

Number of items observed (optional)		Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
		∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

H. *Other signs of vandalism on buildings or equipment (bus shelters, benches, play equipment, telephone booths, streetlights, etc.).*

Number of items observed (optional)	Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
▶ ◀	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

I. *Other signs of vandalism in outdoor public spaces (on trees, landscaping, etc.).*

Number of items observed (optional)		Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
		∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

J. *Abandoned or dilapidated buildings.*

Number of items observed (optional)		Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
▶	◀	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

K. *Poor or defective lighting (broken or out-of-service lights) in public places.*

Number of items observed (optional)	Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

Other situation observed.

Number of items observed (optional)		Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
▶	◀	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

OBSERVATION NOTES

Other situation observed.

Number of items observed (optional)		Observed frequency					Your perception of the consequences' seriousness				
		∅	●	●●	●●●	NA	∅	●	●●	●●●	NA

Describe the situation(s) observed (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Explain why you think the observed or anticipated consequences are problematic (they create insecurity, constitute a nuisance, pose a risk for people, etc.).

[illegible]

Observation summary sheet

INSTRUCTIONS FOR USE

The sample summary sheet presented in the next few pages can be used to compile the observations of all observers **for a single site**. Once their observations have been compiled, observers should have a clearer idea of which situations pose problems, and they should be able to reach a consensus on the relative importance of each one. The summary sheet has four sections: an identification section, a section on the relative importance of problem situations, a section for summarizing findings on situations rated "1", or "very important", and a section where participants can sign the document.

Identification

The identification section is used to indicate the number of observers who studied the site, as well as the number of observers who took part in preparing the summary. It is also used to indicate the period covered by the observation sessions as a whole and the average length of each session.

Table on the relative importance of problem situations

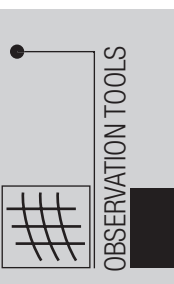
Preparing this table is central to the summary exercise for it highlights the most important or worrisome problem situations as far as safety is concerned. During the exercise, it must be expected that a range of viewpoints will emerge as the data are compared. Therefore, it is a good idea to begin the summary process with items on which observers readily agree. The conclusions drawn will provide a basis for discussing items on which their opinions differ.

The "relative importance" column enables the group of observers to take a stand on each of the situations observed and rank them based on their frequency and the seriousness of their consequences. It is strongly recommended that only a few problems be qualified as "very important" (ideally three or four). The proposed rating scale is as follows:

- 1** Very important
- 2** Important
- 3** Not very important
- Ø** Not a problem/Not applicable

Summary of findings

The last section of the summary sheet is used to pool, summarize and describe the main nuisances observed.



Signatures

One of the sections of the sample summary sheet given here is reserved for signatures of the people who participated in the summary exercise. The question of whether observers want to sign the sheet or not should be discussed with them. If they decide not to sign, it is suggested that the participants' names be entered on the document instead.

The observation summary sheet is available in MS Word format on the Web site of the Québec Safety Promotion and Crime Prevention Centre / Centre québécois de ressources en promotion de la sécurité et en prévention de la criminalité (www.crpspc.qc.ca) at:
http://www.crpspc.qc.ca/default_an.asp?fichier=outils_diagnostic_an.htm

SITE OBSERVATION SUMMARY SHEET

Sector name or number	
Site location or address	
Total number of observers	
Number of observers taking part in the summary	
Average length of sessions (minutes)	
Site observation period	FROM TO

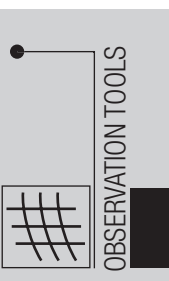
Rate each of the following situations by relative importance.

Situations with nuisance potential	Relative importance			
Aggressive or annoying behaviour by itinerant or homeless people.	1	2	3	Ø
Congregation of young people or adults who engage in annoying behaviour.	1	2	3	Ø
Inappropriate or intimidating behaviour by certain individuals.	1	2	3	Ø
Community repercussions of drug dealing or use.	1	2	3	Ø
Community repercussions of prostitution activities.	1	2	3	Ø
Lack of cleanliness in certain areas (presence of litter, syringes, pieces of glass, etc.).	1	2	3	Ø
Graffiti on buildings or equipment.	1	2	3	Ø
Other signs of vandalism on buildings or equipment (bus shelters, benches, play equipment, telephone booths, streetlights, etc.).	1	2	3	Ø
Other signs of vandalism in outdoor public spaces (on trees, landscaping, etc.).	1	2	3	Ø
Abandoned or dilapidated buildings.	1	2	3	Ø
Poor or defective lighting (broken or out-of-service lights) in public places.	1	2	3	Ø
Other situation:	1	2	3	Ø
Other situation:	1	2	3	Ø
Other situation:	1	2	3	Ø

Relative importance rating scale for situations observed:

- 1** Very important
- 2** Important
- 3** Not very important
- Ø** Not a problem/Not applicable

(WRITE ADDITIONAL NOTES ON THE BACK)



ADDITIONAL NOTES

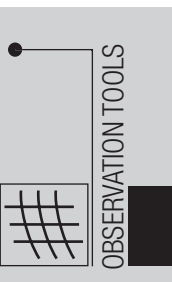
[illegible]

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Problem or nuisance 1

Summarize observations (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Summarize observed or anticipated consequences
(insecurity, nuisance, risk for people, etc.).



Problem or nuisance 2

Summarize observations (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Summarize observed or anticipated consequences
(insecurity, nuisance, risk for people, etc.).

Problem or nuisance 3

Summarize observations (places where or times when problems arose, etc.).

Summarize observed or anticipated consequences
(insecurity, nuisance, risk for people, etc.).

Additional notes and information for the summary

[illegible]

Names and signatures of people who took part in the summary

[illegible]

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Ethical considerations⁷

In recent decades, people's right to privacy has been enshrined in both Canadian and Québec legislation, particularly section 5 of the Québec *Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms*.⁸ In addition, case law provides sufficiently clear guidelines as to what measures should be applied in consulting the population or observing a particular community. Although there is no real need to establish formal rules of ethics for data collection and processing, it is a good idea to reflect on certain ethical issues beforehand and to carefully establish how project team members should proceed so as to prevent them from having to deal with delicate situations totally unprepared.

Three activities will be discussed in this section: 1) observing private or commercial spaces, 2) taking photographs in public places and 3) protecting interviewers or observers, interviewees and victims. The discussion will first focus on the main principles that should guide these activities and then suggest how each activity should be carried out.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Four guiding principles govern the various activities involved in the data collection and processing phase:

Principle 1 Everyone has the right to privacy, even if he/she is in a public place.

Principle 2 Everyone has the right to his/her own image.

Principle 3 Interviewers and observers must never confuse their job with that of the police or other service providers.

Principle 4 Committees and people in charge of conducting safety diagnoses must promise to respect the confidentiality of data gathered.

OBSERVING PRIVATE OR COMMERCIAL SPACES

If observation sessions are to be held in private or commercial spaces, it goes without saying that the authorization of the owner or manager must be obtained. However, obtaining such approval does not exempt observers from having to adhere to the principles listed above. In particular, observers must:

- make sure that their notes do not contain people's names or allow people to be identified;
- keep their observations confidential.

7. The content of this appendix is based on a talk given by Robert Roy, Chair of Applied Ethics at the Université de Sherbrooke, during a meeting at the Ministère de la Sécurité publique on May 22, 2007.

8. R.S.Q., C-12, April 19, 2006 [<http://www.cdpedj.qc.ca/en/commun/docs/charter.pdf>].

TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS IN PUBLIC PLACES

Taking photographs during observation sessions should be guided by principles 1 and 2:

- Observers should always obtain prior approval from people they wish to photograph if the people will be able to be identified on the photograph.
- Photographs of places or buildings should not adversely affect the image or reputation of the owners or occupants. Therefore, if photographs of places or buildings are to be published they should not show any street names or civic numbers.
- Dissemination of photographs should be planned carefully, subject to principles 1 and 2. For example, a photograph can have different effects depending on whether it is included in a final report or shown to the residents of the neighbourhood where it was taken during a meeting held to validate results.

PROTECTING INTERVIEWERS OR OBSERVERS, INTERVIEWEES AND VICTIMS

Due to the nature of the topics dealt with during safety diagnoses, interviewers or observers may hear about criminal or illegal activities from interviewees or other people they encounter; in addition, they may even witness such activities. They may then be faced with the dilemma of deciding whether or not to report the activities. The choice is particularly difficult when the person who has confided in them is a victim of the activities in question. Therefore, people in charge of collecting data or making safety diagnoses must think about these issues beforehand and decide on how to deal with them. Moreover, they must discuss the approach that is to be followed with interviewers or observers before the data collection phase begins to enable them to remain calm if such situations occur. The safety of citizens, be they witnesses, victims, interviewers or observers, must never be jeopardized during a safety diagnosis. In the following three delicate situations, principles 1, 3 and 4 would apply:

- An observer witnesses a criminal activity or an illegal act during an observation session.
- During a focus group or an interview with a key informant, an interviewer hears information about criminal activities from someone who has witnessed them.
- During an interview with a key informant, an interviewer hears information about activities of which the informant was a victim, and this information affects the safety of both the interviewer and the informant.

Unfortunately, it is not possible within the scope of this guide to propose concrete solutions for all situations that can arise in the field. Nevertheless, here are some guidelines for reporting problem situations, particularly with respect to the circumstances under which they should be reported, the people who should be contacted and how to proceed. In addition, observers must be made to realize that they should not try to act as specialized service providers if a person in distress confides in them. The appropriate course of action is to refer the person to the right resource.

WHEN SHOULD INFORMATION OF A CRIMINAL NATURE OR INFORMATION DEEMED SENSITIVE BE DIVULGED?

When criminal or sensitive information is gathered during a safety diagnosis, it should first be reported to the person in charge of the diagnosis. He/she can then submit a private request to a member of his/her safety committee (e.g. police officer, CLSC representative) for assistance in examining the problem. The following questions and statements can serve as guidelines for deciding whether or not to report criminal or delicate situations. They raise several issues that should be taken into account in determining whether reporting is the best option under the circumstances and whether it can be done without adversely affecting the safety and reputation of the people and communities concerned.

Useful questions and statements for guiding decision making on the reporting of criminal or sensitive information:

1. Why does the situation observed or disclosed pose an ethical problem (moral dilemma)?
2. Is there a legal obligation to report the situation observed or disclosed (e.g. mistreatment of a child)?
3. If there is a formal agreement about the confidentiality of information divulged to the interviewer, the agreement should prevail except under exceptional circumstances where the life of someone is at risk (suicide or death threat).
4. Will reporting the situation observed or disclosed put the observer, witness or victim at risk of reprisals? If so, the victim or witness should be asked why he/she did not file a complaint.
5. Does the situation observed or disclosed concern people or property? In the hierarchy of crime, the safety of people takes precedence over that of property.
6. Is there a chance that the situation observed or disclosed will reoccur?
7. Is the victim highly vulnerable because of isolation, a handicap, illness, age or other factors?
8. Did the situation disclosed actually occur or is it merely suspected or assumed to have occurred? Does it reinforce a prejudice of the interviewer or the people in charge of the safety diagnosis?
9. For what reason was the situation disclosed? What are the expectations of the person who described it? Does that person actually have any expectations or is the interviewer simply projecting his/her own values onto that person (e.g. regarding the need to lodge a complaint)? In such cases, it is recommended that the person be asked whether they are at ease with the idea of filing a complaint.
10. Would revealing the situation interfere with a police investigation that is under way?

WHO SHOULD CRIMINAL OR SENSITIVE INFORMATION BE REVEALED TO AND HOW SHOULD IT BE REVEALED?

Once a decision has been made to divulge such information, the latter should be transmitted directly to a police officer or to the chief of the police department or Surêté du Québec station responsible for the area concerned, especially if a crime against a person is involved. This must be done even if it is very likely that the information reported is already known to the police. Moreover, it must be done confidentially so as to avoid jeopardizing the safety of victims and witnesses, disrupting an investigation under way or tarnishing the reputation of someone if the claims are unfounded.

USE OF CRIMINAL OR SENSITIVE INFORMATION

When criminal or sensitive situations are brought to light, they provide pertinent information for developing local action plans based on a better understanding of the communities involved. It is up to the people in charge of the safety diagnosis to decide how the information will be used for analysis purposes and how to incorporate it into the final report in accordance with principles of source confidentiality. The information and statements included in the various documents prepared during a diagnosis must never allow the people who have been interviewed to be identified.

ADDITIONAL REFERENCE

Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness Canada (2006). Evaluating Crime Prevention through Social Development Projects. Handbook for Community Groups
[http://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/prg/cp/_fl/Evaluation_handbook-E.pdf], Module 7, p. 147-156.

Appendix 2

Useful concepts

INCIVILITY, DISORDERLY CONDUCT AND NUISANCES

Incivility and disorderly conduct are deviant behaviours whose recurrence disrupts life in society. They not only run counter to customary rules of sociability,⁹ but have a major impact, especially because the motives behind them seem irrational or totally gratuitous. Incivility involves ill-bred behaviour (e.g. spitting or obscene gestures, rudeness), while disorderly conduct involves behaviour that affects tranquility and social order (e.g. disturbance of the peace at night, graffiti and vandalism).¹⁰ According to Skogan, disorderly conduct is related to the weakening of social control.¹¹

The scientific literature increasingly refers to the concept of public nuisance, which is defined as a consequence of disorderly conduct and incivility or illegal behaviour such as street-level drug dealing. Sansfaçon describes the main characteristics of nuisances as follows:¹²

- they have direct or indirect negative effects on other people;
- they are repetitive and persistent.

There is an interesting relationship between disorderly conduct and incivility, nuisances, and offences punishable by law. Certain types of disorderly conduct and incivility violate municipal by-laws, although the nature of prohibited activities (e.g. disturbing the peace at night, congregation of people) varies depending on the community in which they occur. Furthermore, the importance attached to certain activities by citizens and the police depends on their respective tolerance for them. As for nuisances, they can result not only from disorderly conduct and incivility but also from offences under the *Criminal Code*.

Over the long term, disorderly conduct and incivility adversely affect people's feeling of safety.^{13, 14} Moreover, they are known to be frequently associated with neighbourhood "petty crime": when disorderly conduct becomes more serious and the conditions that foster it more firmly rooted, it can lead to more serious crime.¹⁵

9. Institut des hautes études de la sécurité intérieure (1998). *Guide pratique pour les Contrats locaux de sécurité. Comment réaliser un diagnostic local de sécurité, élaborer un Contrat local de sécurité et mieux recruter les emplois-jeunes?*, fiche 31, Paris, La Documentation française, 324 p. plus appendices.

10. Online Dictionary [<http://onlinedictionary.datasegment.com>].

11. W.G. Skogan (1990). *Disorder and Decline: Crime and the Spiral of Decay in American Neighborhoods*, New York, Maxwell Macmillan International, 218 p.

12. D. Sansfaçon (2006). *Guide méthodologique sur le diagnostic des nuisances relatives aux drogues et à la prostitution*, Centre international de prévention du crime [www.crime-prevention-int.org].

13. W.G. Skogan (1990), op. cit.

14. Centre d'études et de recherches sur la police (CERP), under the direction of F. Dieu (2001). *Diagnostic local de sécurité. Contrat local de sécurité périurbain de l'agglomération de Toulouse*, Toulouse, Presses de l'Université de Toulouse, 418 p.

15. W.G. Skogan (1990), op. cit.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The physical environment of a community includes all of its physical characteristics, such as its natural features (e.g. rivers, woods, relief), developed spaces (e.g. parks, highways, railroads), residential, commercial and industrial components, and layout (e.g. neighbourhoods, sectors, ranges). These characteristics provide clues to the area's potential for creating a safe or an unsafe environment. In assessing this potential, it is very important to consider the nature of the physical environment and especially its quality.

The effects of a deteriorated physical environment on people's insecurity and on crime are well documented, especially those stemming from deteriorated private and public spaces.^{16,17} The term "private spaces" means spaces that belong to individuals or companies, while "public spaces" refers to spaces that are managed by municipal, regional or national governments. For example, a shopping centre is a private space, whereas a municipal park is a public space.

It is important therefore to watch for signs of deterioration (lack of building maintenance, signs of abandonment, graffiti, vandalism, broken windows, dirtiness, piles of litter) in residential blocks or specific sectors. In parks, special attention should be paid to the presence of contaminated syringes, deteriorated or vandalized play equipment, overturned garbage cans, and numerous broken lights. The more evident these signs are, the more they should be the focus of safety diagnoses.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

The term social environment refers to the distribution of the various segments of the population and the social groups that live in and use a given area. It is very important to know the make-up of the population for it can have both a positive and a negative impact on people's feeling of safety.

16. Ibid.

17. Oscar Newman (1996). *Creating Defensible Space*, p. 25-35
[www.huduser.org/publications/pubasst/defensib.html].

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