Background

- >580,000 people experience homelessness nightly in the US
- Many cities have “camping bans” to address unsheltered homelessness
- Denver’s camping ban went into effect on May 28, 2012
- Bans are enforced by “sweeps” of encampments
- Sweeps cited as necessary for “public health and safety”
- Limited evidence that sweeps are effective in reducing crime

Objective

To assess the spatiotemporal relationship between homeless encampment sweeps and area crime.

Methods

DATA SOURCES

- Crime data from Denver police
  - 196/day on average
  - Attributes: date/time, location, category (n=13)
- Sweep data from city of Denver
  - n=303
  - Attributes: date, location

STUDY DESIGN

- Pre-post ecological study
- Knox test statistic (κ) to detect excess spatiotemporal clustering
- 4 catchment areas: 0.25 mi, 0.5 mi, 0.75 mi, citywide
- 3 time periods: 7, 14, 21 days
- 95% confidence interval (95% CI) created via bootstrapping

OUTCOMES

- Primary
  - Δcrimes: change in crime (crimespost – crimespre)
- Secondary
  - crimespre: average number of crimes before sweeps
  - crimespost: average number of crimes after sweeps

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in crime after sweeps, citywide</th>
<th>Change in crimes (Δcrimes) per sweep</th>
<th>Expected change per sweep (95% CI)</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 days</td>
<td>-5.32</td>
<td>(-9.97, 11.42)</td>
<td>.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 days</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>(-13.27, 27.09)</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 days</td>
<td>10.32</td>
<td>(-4.04, 40.61)</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FINDING 1: CRIME DOES NOT GENERALLY DECREASE AFTER A SWEEP

Within 0.25 miles, sweeps were associated with a decrease in crime
No change beyond 0.25 miles

FINDING 2: CRIME IS GENERALLY HIGH IN PERIODS BEFORE A SWEEP

Time periods before sweeps associated with greater than expected crime
Sweeps are reactive to local spikes in crime

FINDING 3: CRIME GENERALLY REMAINS HIGH AFTER A SWEEP

Crime remains higher than expected or within the expected range after sweeps
Sweeps do not prevent crime

Conclusion

- Sweeps are reactive to crime; they occur when crime is spiking locally
- Sweeps do not prevent crime; spatiotemporal clustering of crime remains higher than expected near swept areas in post-sweep periods
- Sweeps are not an effective solution for crime
  - Hyperlocal decreases in crime primarily driven by auto theft and public disorder
  - Significant increase in murder and other crimes against persons (primarily simple assault and domestic violence) at certain distance and time combinations
  - Some crime is diffused outward rather than curtailed outright
  - Sweeps exacerbate cycles of violence against people experiencing homelessness, increasing their risk of overdose, injury, and victimization