

### Three Strikes You're Out A Reform that Worked

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*In 1991 research by the Washington Institute for Policy Studies led to the "Three Strikes You're Out" initiative, which was passed by Washington voters in November 1993, with a 76% voter approval.*

Now, a recent study has demonstrated the effectiveness of "Three Strikes, You're Out":

#### Violent Crime is Down

From 1993 to 1995, violent crime dropped 4.8%, in spite of the fact that property crimes increased 8.2.% during the same period. When adjusted for Washington's population growth, a 3.6% increase, the violent crime rate plummeted 8.1% while property crimes rose 4.4%.

Putting these figures another way, there were 256 fewer rapes, 171 fewer robberies and 845 fewer assaults in 1995 than in 1993. While it is too early to prove cause and effect - that Three Strikes legislation reduced violent crime - the recent crime trend is promising. The fact that violent crime decreased, especially in the face of a general crime increase for all other categories, is very encouraging.

#### Criminals Have Changed Their Behavior

Many police officers, corrections officers and others, both inside and outside

the criminal justice system, have noted that criminals fear Three Strikes. These people have also found that some criminals have modified their behavior. For once, felons are worried about the criminal justice system and that has proven to be a deterrent factor.

Some of the more extensive records have been kept by Detective Bob Shilling, who is in charge of the sex-offender detail of the special assault unit for the Seattle Police Department. Between the time when Three Strikes first made the ballot and its election-day victory, Detective Shilling recorded that 17 two-strike (or worse) sex offenders fled to other states from Seattle alone.

In the week following the passage of Three Strikes, Detective Shilling met with three sex offenders, all two-strikers. The first sex offender complained that it wasn't fair that he already had two strikes against him. The other two sex offenders sought treatment for the first time in their lives and wanted Detective Shilling's help in finding a program. Both stated their fear of a life-without-parole sentence under Three Strikes. More important, neither has re-offended to date.

#### Washington Is Importing Fewer Criminals

Awareness of Washington's Three Strikes law by criminals in other states has

reduced the number of them who choose to move here. A Seattle television station recently ran an expose about how Washington State imported about three criminals for every one exported to another state. The primary reason for this influx was the good Northwest economy. The news reporter covering the story noted that some criminals requesting a move to Washington also requested information on Three Strikes. Once informed, several withdrew their applications.

### Three Strikes More Affordable Than Expected

Washington's Three Strikes law is narrowly focused - affects only violent, career criminals who show no sign of stopping their violent ways. Research showed that only a few career criminals could be covered under the proposal since only about 12% of all state felonies and felony circumstances were included as strikes.

Internal estimates were that out of more than 16,500 felony sentences handed down yearly, only 60-75 career criminals would qualify under Washington's Three Strikes law.

In fact, only 83 criminals have been sentenced under the law after just over three years (December 2, 1993 - December 20, 1996). This is about one-third of the expected total. Many factors contribute to

such a huge difference in the actual-versus-expected figures. One of these reasons is that there has been a deterrent factor on the targeted group of violent, career criminals. This deterrent effect should increase in the future. Not only are first- and second-time inmates meeting career criminals who have been sentenced to life without parole under the law, but prosecutors and judges have started warning strike-one and strike-two offenders as to what sentence occurs after the third conviction for such a crime.

### Career Criminals Targeted

Despite predictions that the law would incarcerate many youthful offenders, for the 83 three-strikers sentenced to date, the average age is 37 years old. These are career criminals, not likely to "outgrow" their antisocial behavior with added maturity.

Of 83 three-strikers, 45% were robbers, 20% were sex offenders and 13% were serious assaulters (for their last conviction). An additional 10% were murderers, while 6% were kidnappers, 5% were armed/violent burglars and an arsonist accounted for 1%.

### Conclusion

Washington's Three Strikes law has worked as intended. The law is incarcerating violent, career criminals who are unlikely to change their behavior.