



## LOCAL NEWS

### Chasing the shots heard round the city

10:17 AM CDT on Thursday, May 17, 2007

By Jeremy Desel / 11 News

In many Houston neighborhoods the sound of gunfire is as common as traffic noise.

Those areas have high levels of crime, but several U.S. cities have found technology that's helping them cut crime in some areas by as much as half.

We are surrounded by sound: tranquil, frustrating, even tragic.

On June 22, 2006, the bodies of [Sally Aparece](#) and Huy Ngo were found in a field in Acres Homes. Both had been shot days earlier -- shots no one heard.

No call to 911, no one coming to help.

It happens here all too often: A gunshot victim is found too late to be saved, and no report of gunshots were ever filed.

One place that doesn't happen is Oakland, Calif.

"This was a particularly bad night in Oakland," Dana Kirsch said. "Three people were shot, and one person was stabbed."

But police didn't need to wait for a call to 911; they knew in seconds.

You have heard of the all-seeing eye; think of this as the all-hearing ear.

"Shot Spotter works by listening for the unique sound of a gunshot," CEO James Beldock said. "Total time from the pulling of the trigger to our announcing the event is 10 to 15 seconds."

It is called gunshot triangulation, a system deployed in 16 cities around the nation.

"I have west oakland, east oakland, la and dc."

Kirsch, who works for Shot Spotter, is watching simply to make sure that the systems are up and running properly, but: "If something happens live, I'll actually watch it unfold," Kirsch said.

So does Lt. David Allison. He oversees the system that went live in October of last year in Oakland.

"We knew that not all gunshot calls were reported by the citizen; we just weren't sure how many were unreported," Lt. Allison said.

It turns out there were plenty.

"Doubled," he said. "Almost close to tripled the number of gunshots a month."

The \$1.5 million system works with sensors placed all over a neighborhood, high-powered microphones always listening. When a shot is fired, the sensors all feed back their data, which are filtered and sent immediately to police dispatchers and even officers in their cars.

The sensor itself is about as big as a coffee can. But the company does not want to say exactly what it looks like because they are afraid folks might try to disable the systems that are deployed in neighborhoods like this one in East Oakland.

It wasn't that long ago that that sensor on a quiet Sunday morning led police to a murder.

The details of this case were clear: hundreds of witnesses, calls to 911, but even then several minutes after the shooting, Shot Spotters response took 15 seconds.

"It has infinite capabilities in really allowing us to protect life and property," Lt. Allison said. "Actually physically hear the gunshots determine if it is multiple gunshots. If it is a single gunshot; if it's an automatic weapon."

Gone are the days of dispatch to a generic block.

"You can see that it is actually in the backyard," Kirsch said.

"It is not just getting the suspect, getting the bad guy and getting the guns, it is also saving and protecting the victims that have been shot or shot at," Lt. Allison said.

Or in the case of Aparace and Ngo, at least finding them without a week-long intensive search that only added to a family's pain.

We are surrounded by sound, and they could be listening.