The review examines the crime reduction effects of focusing on hot spots to reduce crime, whether crime moves to another area (displacement), or if the benefits spill over, reducing crime in surrounding area (diffusion).

The effect of policing efforts is measured using official crime data such as incident reports, emergency calls and arrests.

Nineteen studies are summarized by the review, of which 10 are randomised controlled trials, covering 25 tests of hot spot policing. Seventeen studies are conducted in the USA, one in Australia and one in Argentina.

Seventeen of the studies were conducted in large cities with more than 500,000 residents, ten are in medium-sized cities with populations of 200,000-500,000.
How up to date is this review?
The review authors searched for studies in January 2011. This Campbell Systematic Review was published on June 27, 2012.

What is the Campbell Collaboration?
The Campbell Collaboration is an international, voluntary, non-profit research network that publishes systematic reviews. We summarise and evaluate the quality of evidence about programmes in social and behavioural sciences. Our aim is to help people make better choices and better policy decisions.

About this summary
This summary was written by Robyn Mildon (Campbell Collaboration) and Karen Harries-Rees (Parenting Research Centre). It is based on the Campbell Systematic Review ‘Hot spots policing effects on crime’ by Anthony Braga, Andrew Papachristos, and David Hureau, (DOI:10.4073/csr.2012.8). Anne Mellbye (RBUP) designed and Tanya Kristiansen (Campbell Collaboration) edited the summary.

Does focusing crime prevention efforts on crime hot spots reduce crime?
Yes. High quality evidence shows an overall reduction in crime and disorder when hot spots policing interventions were implemented. The largest reductions are in drug offences, violent crime and disorder offences, with smaller reductions in property crime.

The review also suggests that hot spot policing, particularly problem-oriented policing, is more likely to reduce crime in the surrounding area than it is to lead to crime moving to that area.

What do the findings in this review mean?
Investing police agencies’ limited resources on hot spot policing in a small number of high-activity crime places will prevent crime in these and surrounding areas, reducing total crime. Problem-oriented policing approach allows for developing tailored responses to specific recurring problems in high activity crime spots.

Implementing situational prevention strategies that reduce police reliance on aggressive enforcement strategies may also have positive benefits for police-community relations. The reactions of local communities to hot spot policing must be considered. Residents may welcome efforts to reduce crime. But if policing programmes are seen as heavy-handed, or focus too much on particular population groups, they may end up driving a wedge between the police and those they are trying to help.