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**High profile:
Inside the world
of serial crime**

I know where you live...

Catching a serial arsonist can be as simple as knowing where they live or work, an American crime specialist says.

Rhonda Trahern, a geographic profiler attached to the FBI, says even though they often don't know it, serial criminals leave clues as to their 'anchor point' (the place they start out from each time they commit a crime) by the pattern of their offending.

Rhonda works for the Bureau of Alcohol, Firearms, Tobacco and Explosives (ATF) at the FBI's National Centre for Analysis of Violent Crime at Quantico, Virginia. She is the only geographic profiler working for law-enforcement agencies in the US, and one of just ten in the world.

To do her work, Rhonda just needs

five crime scenes where local police have identified a link to a single offender.

From there she can predict the most likely places where the offender lives, works or goes to school – their anchor point.

It all works on the principle that criminals, like most of us, are lazy people.

US stats show that 70 percent of crimes are committed within two miles (3.2kms) of the perpetrator's home.

Study of serial criminals shows they travel along the same routes to commit crimes that they use in everyday life.

One Canadian example of a serial arsonist showed how these types of criminals operate on what they know: all but one of his fires was lit within

the expected 3.2 km radius, bar one. Later, what had looked like an anomaly turned out to be the arsonist turning his attention to the strip club he frequented.

The concept of geographic profiling has obvious benefits to emergency service teams tracking a serial arsonist such as the one who terrorised Kaitaia earlier this year.

With 20 linked suspicious blazes, the arsonist in that situation would have given Rhonda plenty on information to go on.

But Rhonda says geographic profiling is not a miracle cure for serial offenders.

"There are only three ways of solving a crime: Physical evidence, witnesses and confession. Geographic profiling doesn't solve a crime, it's a tool."



Rhonda Trahern talks to Transalpine assistant region commander Mark Chubb.