



# **The United States Conference of Mayors**

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **The U.S. Conference of Mayors Challenges City Crime Rankings**

**Washington, D.C.** – The U.S. Conference of Mayors today sharply criticized the latest “Most Dangerous Cities” list released by CQ Press, saying the annual city-by-city crime rankings are “distorted and damaging to cities’ reputations.”

“These rankings are based on the misuse of FBI data,” said Rochester, N.Y. Mayor Robert Duffy, a former police chief and Chairman of the U.S. Conference of Mayors Criminal and Social Justice Committee. “And they would be laughable were it not for the genuine damage they inflict on the convention business, economic development and tourist trade -- not to mention the civic pride -- of the cities that come out on the wrong end for no legitimate reason. We are urging media outlets, which have given the rankings broad coverage in the past, to reconsider their approach.”

Mayor Duffy was referring to an annual ranking of the "safest" and "most dangerous" U.S. cities compiled for the last 13 years by Morgan Quitno Press, a tiny, Lawrence, Kan.-based publisher. CQ Press, a division of Congressional Quarterly, Inc., purchased Morgan Quitno in June 2007, and began publishing these rankings this year.

Morgan Quitno's rankings, and now CQ's, are loosely based on the FBI's annual Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) statistics. The UCR program, which dates from the 1930s, gathers crime statistics from thousands of U.S. communities, for the purpose of helping individual communities track their own crime trends and for detecting national patterns.

Among other reasons the rankings are bogus, the Conference said, are these:

- In computing the rankings, Morgan Quitno/CQ weights automobile theft as equal to homicide. “Most people would probably prefer to have their car stolen than to be murdered,” Mayor Duffy noted. “You would not know this from the rankings.”
- The rankings are shaped in good measure by the geography of the city they examine. Older U.S. cities are generally smaller and do not contain middle-class, low-crime areas that lie in their suburbs; newer cities, by contrast, tend to have wider boundaries that contain these neighborhoods.

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In addition, the FBI became so concerned by the rankings that it posted a disclaimer on the web site where it posts the UCR figures ([http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/about/variables\\_affecting\\_crime.html](http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/cius2006/about/variables_affecting_crime.html)). The disclaimer reads:

**Caution Against Ranking**—Each year when *Crime in the United States* is published, some entities use reported figures to compile rankings of cities and counties. These rough rankings provide no insight into the numerous variables that mold crime in a particular town, city, county, state, or region. Consequently, they lead to simplistic and/or incomplete analyses that often create misleading perceptions adversely affecting communities and their residents. Valid assessments are possible only with careful study and analysis of the range of unique conditions affecting each local law enforcement jurisdiction. *The data user is, therefore, cautioned against comparing statistical data of individual reporting units from cities, metropolitan areas, states, or colleges or universities solely on the basis of their population coverage or student enrollment.*

Also, the Conference of Mayors last June passed a resolution critical of the rankings [http://usmayors.org/uscm/resolutions/75th\\_conference/csj\\_05.asp](http://usmayors.org/uscm/resolutions/75th_conference/csj_05.asp). The resolution committed the Conference to working with the FBI and the U.S. Department of Justice “to educate reporters, elected officials, and citizens on what the data means and doesn’t mean.”

On Oct. 17, the U.S. Conference of Mayors joined the FBI, representatives of the non-profit group Criminal Justice Journalists, and two noted academic criminologists in voicing their concerns about the city-by-city crime rankings to representatives of CQ Press. They asked the publishing firm to suspend publication of the city-by-city rankings, and at a minimum to include the FBI disclaimer in any press releases they issued about the rankings.

“We explained to CQ Press how they are misusing the FBI’s annual UCR (Uniform Crime Reports) statistics to create these city crime rankings, but they have persisted in releasing their ‘Most Dangerous Cities’ list anyway,” said Mayor Duffy. “We are disappointed in their decision. These rankings are simply not valid, and they lead to false comparisons that damage our nation’s cities.”

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