

# Cerritos

## Neighborhood Watch Report

August 2002

### Hardening the Target

#### Auto theft and burglary prevention tips offered

Cerritos offers a safe environment due to public awareness, diligent policing by the Cerritos Sheriff's Station and the family-oriented nature of the community.

Within Cerritos and surrounding communities, vehicle theft and vehicle burglary have increased in 2002. Statistics show that 30 percent of the victims of these crimes in the City are Cerritos residents and the remaining 70 percent are non-residents. By using common sense and preventative techniques, you can drastically reduce or eliminate your chances of being targeted by thieves.

#### **Hondas and Toyotas are Most Frequently Stolen**

Law enforcement officials report Honda and Toyota vehicles accounted for 23 of the 25 most frequently stolen cars in California for the year 2001. Thefts of Acuras are also increasing as the cars' high performance parts can be installed in less expensive models. These are very popular cars among drivers and auto thieves for transportation and parts purposes, and are not always taken from high-volume parking lots. Sheriff's deputies report an increasing number of auto thefts have been recorded in residential areas.

Residents are encouraged to take a proactive approach to preventing auto thefts and burglaries. Reliance on a car alarm system is not sufficient, as the frequency with which alarms are triggered has diminished their effectiveness in drawing attention. Thieves are

frequently using altered or "shaved" keys to gain access and start a car. This does not leave any physical damage, and eliminates clues for investigators to track. While some of the following devices will slow down the professional thief, they will generally always stop the amateur criminal.

#### **Use of Anti-Theft Devices is Encouraged**

A simple visible deterrent such as a steering wheel locking device tells the would-be thief that taking your car will require more work. This often makes him or her look for another vehicle.

A kill switch prevents electrical current from reaching the coil or carburetor, and can only be deactivated by using a hidden switch. In some cases, the owner may encounter difficulties with warranty issues when kill switches are installed. Research this and if the possibility of a voided warranty exists, consider using a starter bypass switch. This will essentially accomplish the same result. Use of a fuel switch will interrupt the flow of gas or diesel fuel, and prevent the car from being driven away.

Technology has advanced over the last few years and makes tracking devices a viable option. Law enforcement agencies have the equipment to monitor movement in the event of activation, hence the ability to locate your stolen car. There are also systems in use that employ global positioning satellites that can pinpoint the location of your car to the very block on the

street involved. This can be done if the car is stationary or moving. These services are available for a monthly or annual fee.

If you plan to leave your auto outside and unattended for a period of time, think about removing the coil or distributor cap.

#### **Do Not Leave Valuables in Your Vehicle**

In cases of vehicle burglary, Cerritos deputies have reported that the number one cause is visible items within the passenger compartment that allow the thief to "window shop" and select merchandise. Laptop computers, cellular phones, purses, briefcases and camera equipment are some of the most frequently stolen items. This is attributed to how easily the property can be seen from outside of the vehicle.

High-end car stereo components are also frequent targets and may be difficult to protect. Removable units or locking faceplates can reduce the likelihood of theft.

#### **Park Your Car in Your Garage**

The best security against both vehicle burglary and vehicle theft at your residence is to lock your car in the garage. Hours of darkness are the thief's best opportunity to work in concealment as you and your neighbors are less likely to see anything suspicious to report.

We can all benefit from this information regardless of what make or model of vehicle we possess, but if you own a Honda or Toyota product, you should be especially careful.

# Monthly Crime Summary: July 2002

Cerritos Sheriff's Station recorded a total of 197 Part I crimes (mostly felonies) during the month of July 2002. This figure is up by only five cases from the previous month during a time of year when activity traditionally increases. Fifty-five of these incidents were classified as misdemeanors. Cerritos Sheriff's deputies responded to an average of 390 calls for service each week during July -- a typical rate for summer months.

Eight robberies were investigated last month. On Tuesday, July 2 at 10 p.m. a woman was walking in the parking lot near Gridley Road and South Street. A vehicle pulled beside her and the passenger reached out and grabbed her purse. Under California law, when force or fear is used against someone in the commission of a theft, the crime is elevated to a robbery. On Wednesday, July 3 at 5:30 p.m., a shoplifting suspect produced a handgun to escape from store security personnel near the Los Cerritos Center. He was quickly arrested by deputies. Two suspects struggled with loss prevention officers on Friday, July 12 at 6 p.m. near Gridley Road and 183<sup>rd</sup> Street in another attempt to escape. They too were taken into custody by deputies as they fled. A lone suspect produced a handgun and took a victim's wallet in the lot at Studebaker Road and Alondra Boulevard on Saturday, July 13 at 9:15 p.m.

A purse snatching was upgraded to a robbery on Thursday, July 18 at 3 p.m. near the Cerritos Towne Center. This incident, like the first robbery, was accomplished by a criminal reaching out of a moving car. On Sunday, July 21 at 9 a.m., a shoplifting suspect held up a bottle in an intimidating manner toward store employees as they attempted to detain him in a center near Palo Verde Avenue and South Street. On Saturday, July 27 at 5:45 p.m., a third incident involving a vehicle passenger and a purse snatching

was reported in the parking lot at Gridley Road and South Street.

Consider walking with your purse under your arm and on the same side as parked cars when walking through parking lots. This will make it much more difficult for a suspect to reach out and grab it.

The owner of a restaurant in a nearby city was robbed at his residence near Marquardt Avenue and 166<sup>th</sup> Street on July 27 at 10:15 p.m. It is believed that he was followed home from the business. Sheriff's deputies continue to stress the importance of being aware of your surroundings while walking or driving. Check your rearview mirror after turning to see if the same vehicle is behind you. If you feel that you are being followed, drive to a Sheriff's Station or a well-lighted and heavily occupied area.

Residential burglaries continue to be down over the same period of time last year. Nineteen were investigated by Sheriff's deputies in July. The weekly average for residential burglaries so far this year is 3.77. Eight of these cases were due to open garage doors and were easily visible from the street. Residents reported that scooters, bicycles, tools, and sporting goods were stolen. In the other residential burglary incidents, the most common method of entry was prying sliding glass doors and windows from their tracks. In some cases, windows were left open -- an attractive target for burglars. The primary target was the master bedroom where jewelry and cash are present. Computer equipment and stereo items were also taken.

If you have a burglar alarm or a dog, your chances of being victimized are greatly reduced. Regardless, all windows and doors should be secured before you leave your home. Locking pins and screws are just two ways to prevent a sliding glass door or window from being pried. In addition, being an observant neighbor can lead to an arrest. There has been some speculation

that some of these reported cases were the result of the suspects watching or "casing" the residence from a parked car. If you see a car that you do not recognize, especially if it is occupied, jot down the license number and immediately call the Cerritos Sheriff's Station at (562) 860-0044. The same applies to door-to-door salespersons. Allow deputies the opportunity to check these people out.

Twenty-seven vehicle burglaries were reported in July. This is the lowest figure recorded in a one month period all year. Our weekly average in this category is a little over eight. In the past, high-volume lots were the most frequent location for these crimes to occur. This has shifted to about a fifty-fifty split between those lots and residential neighborhoods. Hours of darkness continue to be the choice of thieves. See the section on "Hardening the Target" in this issue of the "Watch Report" for more information on tips to avoid being a victim of a vehicle burglary or theft.

Auto theft cases rose dramatically the second week of the month but have since dropped back down to the weekly average of eight. The total number of cases reported in July was 45, but this is still down from the same period in 2001 by over 7 percent. Consistent with a statewide trend, Honda and Toyota products dominate the list of stolen vehicles.

## Watch Captains to meet August 28

A Neighborhood Watch Block Captains' meeting is set for 7 p.m. on August 28 at the Cerritos Senior Center at Pat Nixon Park, 12340 South Street. Sheriff's deputies will provide a crime update and crime-prevention information.

Safety Contacts:  
Community Safety Division -  
(562) 916-1266  
Sheriff's Station - (562) 860-0044



To join Cerritos Neighborhood Watch, call Community Mobilization Officer Mike Yach at (562) 916-1258.