

# Cerritos

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# Neighborhood

# Watch Report

December 2002

## Hardening the Target

### Don't be a victim of residential burglary

Residents of the City of Cerritos are fortunate to live in a community that has very few crimes against the person compared to many other places. The most significant issue that we must contend with is our ability to reduce the likelihood that we will become victims of property crimes, the most predominant of which are auto theft, vehicle burglary and residential burglary.

Don't have an open door policy when it comes to residential burglars. Last month, the number one cause of residential burglaries could be directly attributed to leaving doors or windows either open or unlocked. November was not the first month that this has happened. This "open invitation" appeals to a burglar, as entering your home becomes a quiet and effortless task.

#### Secure the perimeter of your home

Noise is not the friend of a residential burglar. Breaking glass tends to attract attention. Burglars prefer entry made by merely sliding open an unlocked door or window, as there isn't any noise. Your goal is to make it as hard as possible for someone to enter your home.

If you are not in the house, make sure that all windows and doors are secured before you leave. As previously mentioned, these are common means of gaining entry. Use locking pins in sliding glass doors and windows as a method to keep them from being pried from their tracks. Increase the stability of these portals by making

this rather inexpensive purchase and installing these pins.

Solid core doors are much stronger in their construction than those that are not. Generally, the side garage door is not visible from the street and offers a thief the concealment to pry and subsequently penetrate it. This door should be solid, without any glass, and equipped with a strong deadbolt lock.

#### Protect target number one: the bedroom

The primary target in residential burglaries is the bedroom, which is known to contain cash, jewelry and other valuable items. These items are easily concealed and yield more of a profit for thieves. Nightstands, dressers and jewelry cases are almost always explored for this purpose.

Be creative in the manner you store your expensive items. Consider keeping them in another room and retrieving them only as needed. The garage and laundry room are places rarely scrutinized in a burglary. A non-distinct container such as a box or even shoes may be worth looking into for storage purposes. Remember that burglars have to work fast, and if they are forced to look in many different places, their frustration level and their chances of detection increase dramatically.

#### Install alarm systems

A wise investment is to equip your home with an alarm system. It is a well-known fact that burglars loathe dogs and alarm systems. If

there is any indication that your home contains either one, the burglar will almost always bypass it and look for another.

Cerritos Sheriff's deputies have taken burglary reports at homes equipped with alarm systems, but are hard pressed to recall any occasion where property was removed. Once the burglar's presence is detected, there is no reason to stick around and greet the arriving deputies.

Most systems emit a high-pitched tone that can be heard as soon as a contact on a door or window is broken, or a motion detector picks up movement inside the home. If you do have pets, we recommend that you explore the perimeter contact alarm concept, as it will not activate the alarm should the pet go from one room to the next.

These systems are not expensive to install or maintain, and generally range from \$20 to \$30 per month. You may be eligible for a reduction of insurance rates after a system is installed.

A well-informed public, equipped with the knowledge of how to take away a thief's opportunity to commit a crime, is a valuable tool for crime prevention. Alert neighbors are responsible for the majority of arrests made in residential burglary incidents.

If something appears out of the ordinary to you, immediately contact the Cerritos Sheriff's Station at (562) 860-0044, or dial 911 to report a crime in progress.

# Monthly Crime Summary: November 2002

Citywide Part I crime (mostly felonies) reported in November was recorded at 230 events. This is up from 179 incidents reported in October, and can be mainly attributed to an increase in vehicle burglaries. Of the total Part I crimes, 55 of these incidents were classified as misdemeanors, or lesser crimes.

Cerritos Sheriff's deputies responded to an average of 355 calls for service per week in November.

Robbery-related incidents were recorded at the lowest level so far this year with four investigated by deputies. On Sunday, November 10 at 7 p.m., a man was entering a theater in the Cerritos Towne Center when he was approached by another male. Words were exchanged between the two and the victim was struck in the face. The suspect removed the victim's necklace and fled. The two were acquainted with each other and the suspect is now in custody.

Another incident involved a lone male suspect who entered a restaurant in the 11400 block of South Street on Monday, November 11 at approximately 3:30 p.m. After he approached a cashier, displayed a handgun and demanded money, he fled with a small amount of cash. This suspect has since been arrested.

On Thursday, November 14 at 5 p.m., a shoplifting suspect struggled with store personnel in the 12700 block of Towne Center Drive in an attempt to escape. Due to the physical force used in the commission of the theft, the crime was classified as a robbery. He was arrested and the property was recovered.

The final incident occurred on Thursday, November 27 at 3:15 p.m. Three male juveniles engaged in a struggle and punched a 15-year-old victim in the 18100 block of Studebaker Road and took his cell phone. Detectives have solid leads in this case.

There were 24 residential

burglaries reported in November. The weekly average in 2002 has been just over four. In the third week of the month, 10 cases were investigated, which is highly unusual. No pattern to these crimes could be identified as far as any particular locations are concerned, as they were spread out all over the City. One common pattern that emerged and continues to be a problem is that open or unlocked doors and windows were frequently used to gain entry. (See this month's segment entitled "Hardening the Target" for more information on residential burglaries.)

As mentioned above, vehicle burglaries rose during November to 50 compared to the 22 reported in October. This is not just a phenomenon being experienced in Cerritos, but in other cities in the region as well. Thieves are constantly attracted to visible items within the passenger compartment of vehicles. They can easily force entry into a car, remove the property and be on their way in just seconds.

In the last week of November, 20 vehicle burglaries occurred, and high-end car stereo components were taken in 17 of them. The bulk of these crimes occur in hours of darkness, and happen in high-volume parking lots and on residential streets. Rarely are the suspects on foot, but are commonly in a vehicle to facilitate a quick getaway. Purses, laptop computers, wallets, and briefcases are frequently taken.

Parking lots of local fitness centers have been targeted by vehicle burglars due to the personal nature of items known to be left inside cars while the victims work out. Purses and wallets have been taken to obtain the identification and credit cards to be used against the victim's credit and accounts in the form of identity theft. When visiting the gym, leave everything in a more secure location, such as your home, with the exception of your driver's license, a small

amount of cash and the specific items needed for the workout. Lockers in these fitness centers have likewise been burglarized for the very same reasons, so avoid leaving valuables and personal documents there as well.

November auto theft incidents totaled 44, but are still down from the 53 reported in November 2001. As with vehicle burglaries, we are seeing an equal division of cars stolen in lots and those stolen in residential neighborhoods. This trend seems to waver from more vehicle burglaries reported in one type of location versus the other on a month-to-month basis. The majority of these stolen cars are taken for transportation purposes, but many are taken for parts and are recovered stripped.

Hondas and Toyotas are the most frequently stolen vehicles, not only in our City and region, but statewide as well. Anyone who owns these brands of vehicles is strongly urged to invest in and use a steering wheel locking device for added insurance and protection.

## Don't make a thief's day!

The Cerritos Sheriff's Station is asking for your help in preventing vehicle burglaries. Do not leave the following items in plain view or unattended in your vehicle:

- Wallets
- Purses
- Briefcases
- Cash
- Jackets
- Cell phones
- Laptop computers
- Gifts
- Any other valuables

Call 911 immediately to report any crime or suspicious activity that is in progress.

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.