

Cerritos

Neighborhood

Watch Report

September 2002

Hardening the Target

Protecting our children from abductions

Child kidnapping cases have recently received extensive media coverage. Statistics show there are few non-family abductions, but based on the horrific circumstances involved, such cases receive extensive publicity.

The inevitable media interest in these cases has been used to inform the public and to alert citizens in the form of an "Amber Alert." We have seen the cooperative efforts of the broadcast media, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and law enforcement in making suspect and vehicle descriptions available to the public in a timely manner. This process is reactive in nature, and only occurs after the abduction.

The Crime Prevention Unit at the Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center has received several calls from parents asking what measures they can take to ensure the safety of their children. With the assistance of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and its California Branch, we offer the following information.

Parents should familiarize themselves with four terms: Situations, Actions, Supervision and Communication.

Situations

Situations entail the circumstances associated with the contact. The term "stranger" should not be emphasized because it implies that there is an oddity about the person that makes them stand out. Children have a great deal of difficulty understanding this concept, and in

turn can become vulnerable when approached by a "normal looking" person.

There is no real need for any adult to solicit the assistance of a child in solving a particular problem such as asking directions or locating a lost pet. Children should never approach a vehicle or a pedestrian in response to such requests, or for any reason. They should not accept food or gifts from someone other than a trusted adult or friend. Another ruse is telling the child that his or her parents sent the person to take them to the parents for some urgent situation. These are just a few examples of situations to be avoided.

Actions

Actions refer to the suggestions or actual physical contact. Any discussion of secrets or other information that a child is told cannot be shared with a parent is unacceptable. This could include, but is not limited to, any special friendship or topic. The child must be leery of any "touching." An area of the body normally covered by a bathing suit is inappropriate to touch or be touched. Youngsters should not fear saying no to anything that makes them uncomfortable. Apprehension in certain circumstances is a positive emotion.

If a child is approached in a threatening or annoying manner, the more noise that can be made to attract attention, the better.

Supervision

Supervision is crucial to the safety of our children and a responsibility

to be shared by all parents and guardians. Set boundaries regarding the places that they can go and the things that they may do. Know where they are at all times and be familiar with their friends and daily activities. Monitor their Internet use and the content accessed.

A trusted adult should always supervise a child in a public place at all times. If you are not physically there yourself and there are any changes of plans, you should be notified. Be cautious about babysitters and be alert for anyone showing an unusual amount of attention to your child or providing them with gifts.

Communication

Communication can strengthen your child's awareness and allow you to learn more about activities that he or she is engaging in. Encourage them to use their instincts in determining what may be inappropriate behavior, and listen to what they have to say. Watch for any changes in your child both physically and emotionally. Reinforce the importance of the "buddy system" and the absolute need for them to check in with you on a regular basis. If they are separated in a public place, they must know not to continue walking around, but to locate an employee or law enforcement officer and tell them what has happened. Assure them that their safety is your main concern and that it requires trust and a dialogue. There is nothing that your children should feel uncomfortable talking to you about.

Monthly Crime Summary: August 2002

Cerritos Sheriff's Station investigated a total of 197 Part I crimes (mostly felonies) during the month of August 2002. This figure is identical to that of April and June of this year. Forty-seven of these incidents were classified as misdemeanors. There was a slight increase in residential and vehicle burglaries the third week of the month, but the total of Part I crimes, after an adjustment, was down by 13 cases compared to July. Cerritos deputies responded to an average of 385 calls for service each week during August. Considering that the summer months are busier, this is not an unusual amount.

Eight robbery incidents were recorded in August. This is one less than last month. This reflects a reduction of nearly 10 percent from the same period last year.

On Thursday, August 1 at 9 p.m. a victim sitting in his parked car near Studebaker Road and Artesia Boulevard was confronted by a lone male suspect brandishing a handgun. A demand for the vehicle was made and the victim complied. This carjacking incident ended when the suspect crashed the vehicle into a nearby planter. Another suspect entered a business near Marquardt Avenue and Artesia Boulevard on Thursday, August 8 at 4:10 p.m. and attempted to steal a quilt. After an employee tried to stop him, the suspect announced that he would harm anyone that prevented his escape. Due to the fear element involved, the crime was elevated to a robbery. The suspect dropped the quilt while running away. On August 10 in a store at Gridley Road and South Street a shoplifter struggled with store employees but was subsequently arrested and charged with robbery due to the force involved. On August 11 at 12:30 a.m. an individual approached a couple that was parked in a car near Regional Park and shined a flashlight at them. The victims were under the belief that the man was a police officer and that they were about to be "arrested." One of them

relinquished \$6 in cash to the suspect. A commercial robbery occurred near Bloomfield Avenue and South Street on Tuesday, August 13 at 11 p.m. The merchant was in the process of locking up the business when a suspect showed a handgun in his waistband and demanded cash.

Two robberies were investigated on Tuesday, August 27. The first was at 3:15 p.m. near Bloomfield Avenue and Park Plaza Drive when juvenile subjects struggled for possession of a bicycle from a 10-year-old boy. At 10 p.m. a restaurant employee was held up on South Street at Pioneer Boulevard and money was taken from the cash register. On Wednesday, August 28 a store at Norwalk Boulevard and Artesia Boulevard was the scene of what started out as a commercial burglary at 4:30 a.m. Two employees were outside on break when the suspects exited the store with stolen cigarettes and apparently thought that their escape would be disrupted. One of them displayed a handgun at the employees as they fled.

There were 20 residential burglaries reported last month. This figure is the second highest reported this year and is still a reduction of nearly 12 percent compared to last year. Residents leaving their garage doors open for ventilation accounted for five of these incidents (or 25 percent). Bicycles were the reported loss in all five. Eight of the others involved doors or windows left open. In one case a sliding glass door was left open while the residents were on vacation and the screen door was merely cut to facilitate entry. Secure all doors and windows whenever you will be away. Install locking pins in sliding doors and windows, and deadbolts in solid core entry doors. Consider purchasing and maintaining an alarm system. Always report any suspicious person or vehicle in your neighborhood to the Cerritos Sheriff's Station immediately.

Cerritos Sheriff's Deputies

stopped and detained a suspicious person found to be in possession of a stolen laptop computer taken moments before. His arrest has cleared up other residential and vehicle burglaries that he has been linked to.

Vehicle burglary incidents were logged at 36 last month. The weekly average in 2002 for such crimes is currently 8.29. Regionally, this figure has increased over the summer months. The majority of these crimes occurred on lots during the month of August. Many cases are via entry with no apparent signs of origin. This can be directly connected to leaving windows down for ventilation or not locking doors. The primary cause of attraction to any given car is the presence of visible items within the passenger compartment. Whether your vehicle is in a lot or a residential area, purses, laptop computers, wallets and briefcases are known to yield a noteworthy profit for the thief. High-end car stereo components are also a likely target. If you must carry these items in your car and do not take them with you when you park, place them in the trunk or in a spot that will not be visible from outside of the vehicle.

Auto thefts in August were down from the 45 reported the previous month. Thirty-nine cases were handled by the Cerritos Sheriff's Station. The 2002 weekly average is 8.26 thefts, but is down approximately 2 percent over last year at the same time. The most commonly stolen vehicles in Cerritos are consistent with those reported in the State of California and are Honda and Toyota products. A recent arrest of a local car thief who could be responsible for more than 250 vehicle thefts confirmed that he was not at all interested in a car that displayed a steering wheel locking device, as it would delay him in his endeavor. He was quoted as saying that he would bypass that one and simply look for another. This is a good lesson to learn in protecting your personal property.

Safety Contacts:
Community Safety Division -
(562) 916-1266
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To join Cerritos Neighborhood
Watch, call Community Mobilization
Officer Mike Yach at
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