

Cerritos Neighborhood Watch Report

April 2003

Hardening the Target

Protect yourself from biological and chemical threats

Biological and chemical weapons pose unusual problems for a community because it may take hours or even days to determine that an event has occurred. Areas of greatest risk are those sites that attract a large group of people. Enclosed venues create a much higher potential for a biological or chemical event.

The United States Department of Homeland Security issues warnings on the alert status of the nation. Orange, which means a "very high risk of attack," and Red, "the highest risk of attack," should be heeded, and areas with large gatherings should be avoided during these alert situations.

In the event of an attack, the government will notify the public on the actions that it is taking, and will advise citizens on the actions that they should take. It is very important to remain calm and fully cooperate with authorities. In the past, we have stressed the need to be prepared for an earthquake by maintaining a supply of at least three days worth of food and water for each person in the household. The same holds true for a terrorist act where venturing outside may be hazardous.

Three things to always keep in mind when dealing with biological and chemical events are time, distance and shielding. The less time that you remain in a threatened area, the better off you will be. Put as much distance between you and the problem, and shield yourself by

using clothing to cover your mouth and nose.

Use media outlets such as the radio and television as a source of information. The speed that this information is delivered is key to identifying problem areas and learning what steps to take in response to such an event.

Learning more about terrorism will also help with your preparation. For instance, the fact that terrorists look for visible targets where they can avoid detection such as international airports, large cities, major events, government buildings, resorts and high-profile landmarks is useful information. These are locations where you should make it a point to be on your highest level of awareness.

Be prepared and observe your environment. Terrorists most often strike with little or no warning. Watch for suspicious activities and people and do not be hesitant in reporting these activities to law enforcement.

Use caution when you travel. Keep your packages with you at all times and never accept packages from strangers. Locate stairways and emergency exits and develop plans for evacuating buildings and crowded public areas. Agree on a meeting place with your group in case any of you become separated.

Remember that in the event of a fire, heavy smoke and poisonous gasses collect near the ceiling first. Stay low to the floor at all times and exit as quickly as possible. Cover

your nose and mouth with a wet cloth and always feel closed doors with the back of your hand before opening. If the door is hot, do not open it. Seek another way out.

If there is an explosion, take cover under something sturdy or get down on the ground and cover your head. If a strange odor exists, cover your mouth and nose with clothing and exit the building as quickly as possible.

Major goals for the terrorist are to disrupt our lives and make us live in fear. While this topic may not be comfortable to discuss, observing, reporting and preparing will help us stop an act before it occurs, and will assist us in reacting in a calm and efficient manner in the unlikely event that something of this nature does happen in Cerritos.

Log on to the new
Cerritos Sheriff's Station/
Community Safety Center
web site at:

www.safercerritos.com

for crime prevention tips,
emergency preparedness
information, community
safety links and more.

Monthly Crime Summary: March 2003

Part I felony crimes in the City of Cerritos during the month of March were recorded at 146 incidents. This is an increase of 39 from the 107 incidents recorded in February. This increase can be attributed to more vehicle burglary investigations. Deputies handled an average of 336 calls for service each week. That figure is lower than the nearly 360 weekly call average established in 2002.

Six robbery related incidents were investigated by Cerritos deputies in March. The first occurred on Saturday, March 8 at 10:25 a.m. when a gardener placed a leaf blower on the ground in the 19600 block of Sheryl Avenue. A suspect picked up the item and ran from the location, in close pursuit by the gardener. The suspect stopped and displayed a handgun to discourage the victim from continuing.

A woman was walking through the bank lot at Artesia Boulevard and Norwalk Boulevard on Thursday, March 13 at 10 a.m. when a male suspect grabbed her bank bag from behind and fled. A gunman robbed a business in the 11500 block of South Street at 8:13 p.m. that day after the manager was forced to open the safe and surrender cash. On Friday, March 14 at 10:50 a.m. a shoplifting suspect in the 11900 block of South Street stole a baseball bat and struggled with loss prevention officers in an attempt to escape. He was quickly subdued and arrested.

Two armed suspects took money from a cash register and from employees at a fast food restaurant in the 17200 block of Norwalk Boulevard on Thursday, March 20 at 10:30 p.m. On Friday, March 21 at 11:55 a.m. two male teens held a man's wrists and went through his pockets near Bloomfield Avenue and 166th Street, subsequently taking his cell phone, wallet and credit cards.

There have been incidents reported in recent weeks involving distinctly marked bank bags. Statistics show that when two or more

persons are present, they are less likely to become the victims of a robbery. If you must make bank deposits, consider using a less obvious container and having another party accompany you.

Residential burglary cases in March were recorded at 22, compared to 10 in February. Property taken in these incidents included jewelry, cash, credit cards and computer and stereo equipment. These items have a better chance of resale and can be pawned.

Twelve of the burglary cases were the result of open/unlocked doors or windows. Some of these cases involved family members or acquaintances and are being investigated by detectives. The residential burglary weekly average at the end of March was 3.5. There was an outstanding arrest made by field deputies that placed three suspects in custody. The suspects were from a neighboring community and could be responsible for several crimes in the Cerritos area. This too is being actively pursued by detectives.

While statistics show that 25 to 30 percent of victims in auto burglary and auto theft cases are Cerritos residents, 100 percent of those victimized by residential burglars are from the City. We have the ability to reach this group of citizens with crime prevention information that will make them less vulnerable.

Simply making sure that your home, apartment or condo is secure prior to leaving drastically reduces your chances of becoming a statistic. Residents inclined to leave their garage doors open for added ventilation are providing an open invitation to a burglar.

Vehicle burglaries presented the highest increase in occurrences last month. This is a regional problem and not just specific to Cerritos. Vehicle burglaries were reported at 49 in March compared to 24 in February. The weekly average has been 8.29 in 2003.

High-end stereo items, as ap-

pealing as they are for resale purposes, were not the prime target of thieves last month. Visible items within the passenger compartment were the reason for break-ins and were disproportionately higher in March. Motorists left cell phones, purses, wallets, briefcases, laptop computers, jewelry and other valuable items in plain view.

Perform the "victim's self-test" by standing outside of your car and looking in. What items attract your attention? Remember that hidden items can also be taken. A SUV could be a better target because it does not have a separate trunk area that can be secured. The best approach is to ask yourself if you really need to have any given item in your car when you park it.

Finally, there were 30 vehicle theft cases investigated in March compared to 28 in February. High-volume parking lots seem to be the venue most preferred by thieves, but residential streets are by no means exempt.

Approximately eight vehicle theft cases have been reported each week this year. Older model Toyotas and Hondas continue to lead the list of the most stolen vehicles. These are popular models and are taken for both transportation and for stripping of parts that are then resold.

Regardless of the make and model of vehicle that you drive, a sound, simple and inexpensive way to protect your vehicle is to invest in a visual physical deterrent such as a steering wheel locking device. This is not an appealing prospect for a criminal, who will almost always pursue another easier target.

Check out the new web site devoted to public safety in the City of Cerritos at www.safercerritos.com, and become a member of the Cerritos Crime Prevention Team (C.C.P.T.). Members receive current information on a variety of topics intended to make them better informed and safer as they engage in home, business and recreation activities within the City.

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.