

Cerritos

Neighborhood

Watch Report

August 2003

Hardening the Target

Protect yourself from identity theft

The Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center has received several questions about identity theft and mail theft. Often, these two types of crimes are connected. The theft of mail produces the information needed to:

- Use or open a credit card account fraudulently;
- Open telecommunications or utility accounts fraudulently;
- Pass "bad checks" or open a new bank account;
- Obtain a loan in another person's name; or
- Obtain employment in another person's name.

Information that a thief would need in order to establish new accounts in your name can be obtained from Social Security cards, credit cards, driver's licenses, cancelled checks, health insurance cards and even billing information. A change of address can be requested on an existing account or on a new account, and it can be a long time before you become aware of the problem.

There are methods available to protect this information, making it less likely that it will fall into the wrong hands. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and the United States Postal Service have a few recommendations for the consumer to consider when providing information, including tips on how to better protect documents and the mail:

- Find out exactly how the information is to be used;
- Pick up the mail soon after delivery;

- Consider dropping off outgoing mail at the post office;
- Pay attention to your billing cycles and review all statements carefully;
- Always shred documents that contain personal information;
- Give your Social Security number only when necessary;
- Minimize the identification information and the number of cards that you carry to those that are actually needed;
- Keep items with personal information in a safe place and shred them when you do not need them anymore; and
- Be sure to obtain a credit report every year to monitor activity on your various accounts. This is how many victims find out that

they have been taken advantage of. There are three major companies that offer this service:

- Equifax (888) 766-0008;
- Experian (888) 397-3742; and
- TransUnion (800) 680-7289.

Identity theft is the fastest growing crime in the United States. Last year more than 7 million adults were victimized. Any steps we can take to protect ourselves will lessen our likelihood of becoming a part of these statistics. Reducing the amount of personal information you make available, and protecting your mail from theft will help "harden the target." As always, be aware and immediately report any suspicious activity in your neighborhood to the Cerritos Sheriff's Station.

Back to school safety tips offered

With the start of the new school year, the Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center would like to offer residents a few safety tips. Traffic will increase during this time, as pedestrians, bicyclists, buses and parents in automobiles contribute to school zone congestion.

Children do not always follow the rules of the road. Oftentimes they can enter the street from between two cars or attempt to get their bikes through an intersection before the light turns red. Heightened awareness is imperative in and around a school zone. Potential hazards are much easier to perceive if you are driving at or below the school zone speed limit of 25

mph. Special attention must also be paid to buses displaying flashing red lights when on a two-lane roadway. You are required by the California Vehicle Code to stop and wait until the flashing red lights are turned off before passing.

Children under the age of 18 must wear a helmet when riding a bicycle, and they must travel with the flow of traffic. Beware of bulky backpacks that can affect your child's balance while bicycling.

Finally, children should be provided with some form of adequate supervision if they arrive home before you do. Arrange an organized activity or plan for a trusted adult to be with your children.

Monthly Crime Summary: July 2003

Overview

Part I felony crimes in the City of Cerritos were recorded at 138 incidents during the month of July. July is traditionally a busy month for criminal activity. This was reflected in an average of 352 calls for service per week, which is up compared to the 338 calls for service per week last month.

Robberies

There were seven robbery-related incidents investigated by Cerritos deputies in July, compared to eight in June of this year.

During the week ending Sunday, July 6, there was one robbery reported. There are, however, indications that this was not an actual robbery, but rather a dispute between parties involved. Detectives are currently investigating.

On Thursday, July 10 at 7:40 p.m., what began as a shoplifting case was elevated to a robbery when a male and female suspect stole earrings from a store in the Los Cerritos Center and struggled with employees in an attempt to escape. Both were arrested and found to have other theft arrests.

The following day at 10:50 p.m. in a condominium complex north of 166th Street near Bloomfield Avenue, a female victim pulled into a parking space near her condominium and observed a vehicle make a U-turn and drive back toward her. A male Hispanic exited the car and walked toward her, at which time he told her to stop, pointed a silver handgun at her and told her to hand over her purse. A second suspect, also a male Hispanic, then walked up and demanded the victim's cell phone. Both suspects ran back to their car and sped away.

On Tuesday, July 15 at 4 p.m., a man prepared to get into his car in a lot in the 13300 block of Artesia Boulevard when the driver of a parked car next to his called for his attention and displayed a handgun. The suspect eventually relieved the victim of his wallet and cell phone. The suspect, described as a male

Hispanic, 28 to 35 years of age, approximately 5 feet 8 inches tall and 225 pounds, left the location in a small '78 to '85 burnt orange or red two-door American-made vehicle. This suspect is wanted in multiple cases in the area.

Another incident occurred on Thursday, July 24 at 4:10 p.m. when two suspects entered a store in the Los Cerritos Center. While one suspect engaged an employee in conversation, another selected a camera from a display. When the suspect holding the camera attempted to leave the store, a struggle ensued between the suspect and the clerk. The camera was recovered and the suspect was later arrested.

An attempted robbery occurred at 5:40 p.m. that same day. A female victim parked her car and began walking toward a store in the 11500 block of South Street when a male ran up behind her and grabbed her purse. The two wrestled for control of the purse, with the suspect finally giving up and running to a waiting '85 to '90 black, lowered Honda Civic four-door vehicle.

The final incident occurred on Monday, July 28 at 7:30 p.m. when a female suspect entered a store in the Los Cerritos Center. After selecting several clothing items, she attempted to leave and was confronted by employees. A struggle ensued and the suspect was ultimately taken into custody. She had been responsible for at least six other shoplifting incidents in the region over the past few months.

Residential burglaries

Twenty-one residential burglaries were reported to the Cerritos Sheriff's Station during the month of July. At the end of the month, the weekly average in this category was 3.7 for the year to date. As expected, residents trying to keep their homes cool left windows and doors open that were used by suspects for easy entry. There were no identifiable trends other than the

fact that two cases each occurred north of 166th Street and west of Studebaker Road, and north of Artesia Boulevard and west of Shoemaker Avenue. Items that were typically taken in these crimes included cash, jewelry, computer equipment, credit cards and personal documents. Bicycles, tools, and sporting equipment were taken from open garages.

When you leave your home, conduct an "exit security check" to ensure that all of your windows and doors are properly secured. Second-story doors and windows are not exempt.

Vehicle burglaries

Thirty-three vehicle burglaries were reported in July. The weekly average at the end of the month was 7.8 for this year. Parking lots were the primary location where these crimes occurred, but burglaries also took place on residential streets and driveways. High-end stereo equipment was appealing to thieves, but visible items such as laptops, wallets, purses and briefcases contained within the passenger compartment continued to dominate the list of stolen property.

SUVs and pick-ups continue to be targeted, as thieves know that they do not contain secure trunk space. Also, vehicles parked near fitness centers are targets, as they are known to contain items that victims are afraid to put in lockers, such as wallets, purses, cash, credit cards and identification documents.

Vehicle thefts

Cerritos deputies investigated 29 vehicle theft cases in July. At month's end, the weekly average was 7.6 for 2003. While Honda and Toyota products continue to be the vehicles most stolen, any vehicle is subject to being used for transportation. Statistically, the odds of recovering a stolen vehicle are in your favor, but the time and effort you can save by purchasing an inexpensive steering wheel locking device to protect your vehicle is certainly worth it.