

Cerritos

Neighborhood Watch Report

December 2003

Hardening the Target

Safety tips for the holiday season

While the holiday season is a festive time, it also brings out an undesirable element in terms of crime. Many individuals will take advantage of the charity of others through solicitation scams. Others will prey upon those whose attention may be caught up in making last minute purchases and returning merchandise.

Criminals are aware that during this time of year, homes are filled with gifts, malls and shopping centers are packed with unsuspecting customers and parking lots are full of vehicles containing recently purchased items. The Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center would like to offer residents the following tips to help make this holiday season safer.

Don't advertise recently purchased merchandise by allowing it to be viewed from outside the home

Many people like to place items under a Christmas tree and display the tree in a front window. Doing this presents an opportunity for anyone passing by to "window shop." Residential burglars are known to use this method while casing a neighborhood for targets that are likely to yield a lot of property. They know exactly what to look for and where to find it before entering the home, and do not have to waste any time ransacking through the house.

Don't let your trash tell a story

Be aware that when you place wrappings and boxes at the

curbside on trash day, you are showing everyone what is inside of your house. Before throwing anything away, cut up large boxes and conceal them inside of a closed trash can.

Secure your house

If you are going out for the evening, turn on the lights (which can be set on a timer) or keep a radio or television on while you are away. This creates the illusion that someone is home. Conduct an "exit security check" before you leave to make sure that all windows and doors are secure.

Take a holiday inventory

The holidays are a good time to create or update a home inventory list. Take photos or make a video of items that you own, listing all serial numbers. If your home is burglarized, having a detailed list can help identify stolen items, make insurance claims easier to file and assist law enforcement in the recovery of these items and the arrest of the criminals. Property such as televisions, VCRs, stereos, cameras, computers and jewelry should be included on the list.

Beware of those seeking charitable contributions

Be aware that many individuals seek to take advantage of other's compassion for the less fortunate during this time of year. Solicitors have been known to be less than scrupulous and even look around the interior of a home to survey the property when you open the door. Telephone solicitors can be relentless and wear you down to the

point that you give in. If you are not familiar with the charity involved, beware and be firm. Use a peephole installed in the door, and don't open the door unless you know the calling party.

Shopping tips

Stay alert and always be aware of your surroundings. Park in a well-lighted space, ensure that you lock the car, close all windows and hide shopping bags and gifts in the trunk. Try to shop in pairs when possible, as this reduces the risk of a robbery or purse-snatching. Avoid carrying large amounts of cash, and only carry one credit card whenever possible.

Don't overburden yourself with packages. Carry your purse close to your body and don't let it dangle by the straps. Put your wallet in an inside coat or front pants pocket. If you are shopping with children, make sure that they know to contact a store clerk or security guard if you become separated.

ATM safety

Prepare any deposit slips before going to an ATM. Shield the keypad with your hand or body when entering your personal identification number (PIN). Do not leave your transaction record behind at the ATM. If you use a drive-up ATM, make sure that all windows are rolled up and the doors are locked.

Be aware of your surroundings and if you notice anything suspicious, use another ATM or return later. If you must use an ATM at night, consider taking someone with you.

Monthly Crime Summary: November 2003

Part I felony crimes in the City of Cerritos were recorded at 131 events in the month of November, down from the adjusted figure of 161 the previous month. Compared with October, there were reductions in vehicle burglaries and vehicle thefts. To date, deputies have handled an average of 354 calls for service per week in 2003.

Robberies

There were five robbery-related incidents investigated by Cerritos deputies in November, up from three in October of this year.

On Thursday, November 13 at 11:05 p.m., two gun-wielding suspects confronted departing employees in the lot of a fast food restaurant in the 13400 block of Alondra Boulevard. The suspects forced the victims to reopen the business and then took cash from the office as well as the personal cash and wallets of the employees.

On Wednesday, November 19 at 2:40 p.m., a male shoplifting suspect struggled with loss prevention personnel outside of a store located in the 11900 block of South Street. After allegedly striking and kicking employees, he was taken into custody and a stolen pair of tennis shoes was recovered.

An attempted robbery occurred on Saturday, November 22 at 1:30 p.m. A female juvenile was walking near Aclare Street and Grayland Avenue when one of two male juvenile suspects attempted to pull a purse from her shoulder. They were chased away by a resident who came to the victim's aid.

On Monday, November 24 at 8:55 a.m., two suspects forced their way into a home in the 12400 block of Patricia Avenue and made a resident show them to a safe that contained cash and jewelry. After tying up the victim, both suspects fled with the safe. There is information to suggest that the suspects knew the victim and that the residence was not a random target.

The final case occurred on

Saturday, November 29 at 7:30 p.m. when a shoplifting suspect attempted to leave a store in the 11500 block of South Street. When he was confronted by loss prevention employees, a struggle ensued and he was taken into custody by arriving Cerritos deputies.

Residential Burglaries

Twenty residential burglaries were reported in November. This is up from 16 investigated in October, but down nearly 12 percent from a year ago. Most of the stolen property consisted of small concealable items such as jewelry and cash. Bedrooms continued to be the primary target of burglars, where the bulk of valuables are known to be stored. While open/unlocked doors and windows are responsible for many of these crimes, the majority are attributed to the prying of sliding glass windows and doors from the frames. This suggests that there was adequate vertical or horizontal movement present before the crimes occurred. Check these portals in your home and if movement exists, consider using locking pins to properly secure them. Also, solid core doors with deadbolt locks are a must for any exterior door.

Vehicle Burglaries

Twenty-eight vehicle burglaries were investigated in November, down from 49 in October. While high-end stereo components are frequently taken, the vast majority of items targeted are those that are visible inside the passenger compartment. Victims reported items such as cell phones, lap top computers, purses, wallets, briefcases, suitcases, cash and personal identification as property stolen from dashboards, seats and floorboards. There have also been cases where accessories including seats and airbags have been taken from more expensive SUVs. Parking lots continue to be the venue of choice for thieves, as they contain multiple vehicles and offer

thieves variety and convenience.

Vehicle Thefts

Twenty-six vehicle thefts were recorded in November, down slightly from 30 in October. This is the third lowest monthly number reported in 2003, and an overall reduction of nearly 16 percent compared to a year ago. Similar to vehicle burglaries, high-volume parking lots are the venue for nearly all of the reported stolen vehicles. While Hondas and Toyotas continue to be popular targets, we have seen various other makes and models stolen, supporting the notion that the primary motive for vehicle thefts is to obtain transportation. It is not uncommon for a stolen vehicle to be recovered in the same parking lot as another vehicle reported stolen. Visible deterrents such as steering wheel locking devices are known to discourage the would-be thief, who will pass up a vehicle equipped with such a device and quickly move on to another that is not.

Holiday Survival Tips

- Never drink and drive.
- Don't let your guests drink and drive.
- Never serve alcohol to anyone under the age of 21.
- Never ride in a vehicle with anyone that has been impaired by alcohol or drugs.
- Remember that the penalties faced upon a drunk driving conviction are only secondary to the potential loss of life and serious injury associated with alcohol consumption. Use a designated driver.

Please be safe and have a happy holiday season.

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.