

Cerritos

Neighborhood

Watch Report

February 2003

Hardening the Target

Residents are warned to beware latest ATM scam

The Cerritos Sheriff's Station has received reports that criminals are putting a clear, rigid, plastic "sleeve" into ATM card slots. When you insert your ATM card, the machine cannot read the strip, so it will keep asking you to enter your pin number. Meanwhile, someone is watching you from behind as you enter your pin number multiple times. Eventually you give up, thinking that the machine has captured your card, and you walk or drive away. The thieves then remove the sleeve

and your card, and are now free to withdraw cash from your account.

To avoid this scam, run your finger along the ATM card slot before inserting your card. The sleeve has tiny prongs that the thieves need to get your card back out of the slot after you have left. You will be able to feel these prongs. If you do, leave at once without inserting your card. If the banking facility is open, notify an employee. If not, leave the area and contact your local law enforcement

agency.

Remember to always look around prior to using an ATM to see if anyone is watching you. They could be waiting for you to withdraw money with the intention of committing a robbery. We recommend that you do not use an outside ATM after dark, and that you avoid any machine where your field of vision is reduced by barriers, walls, etc. These are likely places for someone to hide while you are making a transaction.

"Shelter in place" to protect yourself from hazardous materials

When chemical agents are released into the air either by accident or intentionally, venturing outdoors can be very dangerous. Hazardous materials can drift with the wind over a wide area. This is something to always be aware of as we live in an area with a major freeway interchange frequently traveled by trucks carrying such chemicals.

Most chemical releases will last only a few minutes, and staying inside, or "sheltering in place," could be the wisest and most adequate method of protecting yourself. This simply means staying inside until the hazard has cleared. By assembling a few items (some of which should already be in your earthquake survival kit), you will have quick access to materials needed in an emergency.

You should have a battery-powered radio with extra batteries. You should also have access to a

phone. A towel for under the door and a few rolls of duct tape are necessary to seal windows. Keep these items in a container that is easy to store, access and remove.

Designate a room in advance for sheltering. Try to use one that has access to an adjoining restroom and has the least amount of windows. This will make water more readily available. When an emergency occurs, remember that time is of the essence. Immediately go indoors, close the doors and windows, shut off heaters and air conditioners and close the fireplace damper. Start sealing windows with duct tape by placing it around the window frame. If you have sliding windows, seal the center as well. Also seal vents and doorframes.

Cover your nose and mouth with a wet cloth and monitor the local news on radio or television. Pay attention to the assessment of the hazard and listen for additional

instructions. Following an "all clear" message, you will need to thoroughly air out your home.

If you are driving, continue to do so unless otherwise directed by emergency personnel or traffic control devices. Close all windows and vents and shut off the heater or air conditioner. Tune your radio to a news station (KNX 1070 AM or KFVB 980 AM) and listen for instructions. If the engine stalls, do not restart it. Shelter in place.

If you are in a parked car when an emergency takes place, do not start the engine. Remain inside, close all windows and vents and shut off the heater or air conditioner. Without restarting your engine, tune your radio to a news station and listen for instructions.

Knowing what to do when a hazardous chemical is released could save you crucial seconds necessary to survive or avoid serious consequences.

Monthly Crime Summary: January 2003

Some 158 Part I felony crimes were investigated by Cerritos Sheriff's deputies during the month of January. The weekly average of calls for service was 334 in 2003 compared to 359 at the end of 2002.

Ten robbery related incidents were investigated in January. On Friday, January 3 at 4 p.m. at the intersection of 166th Street and Shoemaker Avenue, a lone male grabbed a victim riding a bike and demanded the bike after displaying a screwdriver. The victim complied and the suspect fled. A shoplifting incident at the Los Cerritos Center escalated into a robbery on Thursday, January 9 at 7:20 p.m. when loss prevention personnel attempted to detain the suspect. The suspect struck an employee on the arm in an attempt to escape and was quickly taken into custody. The stolen property was recovered.

A burglar was surprised by a resident on Tuesday, January 14 at 3:30 p.m. in the 13500 block of Abana Street. The victim was unharmed, but was locked in a closet while the suspect left the scene. On Wednesday, January 13 at 9 p.m. a lone suspect approached a man in a parking lot near Gridley Road and South Street. After a brief conversation, the suspect produced a knife and the victim relinquished his wallet. A carjacking incident occurred on Friday, January 17 at 2:30 p.m. in a parking lot on Studebaker Road near the 605 Freeway. The suspect, believed to be under the influence of drugs, was later arrested, and the vehicle was recovered in a nearby city.

At 12:15 p.m. on Saturday, January 18, a man standing in a lot near the intersection of Norwalk Boulevard and the 91 Freeway was approached by a man holding a handgun. The victim gave the suspect his wallet. Later that day at 7:30 p.m., a robbery occurred when a woman's purse was grabbed by a lone male at the Cerritos Towne Center and a struggle ensued.

A robbery occurred on Monday, January 20 at 3:48 p.m. at a store located in the 11800 block of Del Amo Boulevard, when two teenage males trying on clothes suddenly pushed a salesclerk aside and fled with two sweatshirts. A robbery involving a taxi driver and a passenger traveling from Fullerton to Los Angeles occurred on Tuesday, January 21 at approximately 1 a.m. The cab driver pulled off the freeway at Alondra Boulevard and summoned deputies after the passenger pulled out a knife. The suspect was quickly arrested and detectives later determined that he had been delusional and in fear of some unknown party. The robbery charges were dropped.

The final incident occurred in a bank parking lot on Thursday, January 23 at 5:25 p.m. near Artesia Boulevard and Norwalk Boulevard. A merchant was walking with a bank bag when a male suspect grabbed the bag and fled on foot.

Residential burglaries were recorded at 14 during January, a decrease from 40 investigated in December 2002. This decrease can be attributed in part to two separate arrests that netted four residential burglars, in addition to some strategic deployment by Cerritos Sheriff's Station personnel. The weekly average of residential burglaries has been three.

Open doors and windows continue to account for nearly half of these crimes. There are also a growing number of cases reported where residents have installed an alarm system, causing the burglar(s) to flee without taking any property. The purpose of these systems is to alert the thief that his or her presence has been detected. We highly recommend that you invest in a home burglar alarm system if you are away during the daytime.

Additional methods used to gain entry into homes in January were prying open sliding glass doors and windows not equipped with a locking

pin, and breaking windows. These methods most often occur in the back or side yard where the suspect has some form of concealment. Another entry was made possible after the theft of a garage door opener from an unlocked car parked in the driveway.

Property taken in January included jewelry, cash, personal identification items, credit cards and stereo and computer components.

Cerritos deputies handled 38 vehicle burglary investigations in January, bringing the weekly average of these crimes to nearly 8.5 in 2003. Higher-volume parking lots continue to be the main location that vehicle burglars prefer. Thieves commonly walk between cars looking for valuable items left in plain sight. It takes only seconds for burglars to enter and remove your property. Remove the opportunity and keep these items in your trunk, if you must leave them in your car at all.

Stereo items are always popular due to the market for stolen property. In addition to these items, do not leave valuables such as purses, wallets, briefcases, cell phones, gym bags, laptop computers and jewelry items in the passenger compartment of your vehicle.

Cerritos deputies investigated 41 vehicle thefts in January, bringing the average to 8.8 per week. Because the theft of a vehicle is more "target specific," these crimes occur both in higher-volume lots as well as residential neighborhoods.

According to CCC Information Services Inc., a Chicago-based supplier of software and communications systems to auto insurers, the 1991, 1989 and 1990 models of the Toyota Camry, in that order, topped the annual study of theft claims from insurers. They were followed by the 2000 Honda Civic and the 1995 and 1994 models of the Honda Accord. Always use a steering wheel locking device, brake pedal lock or other visible deterrent whenever you leave your car outside.

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.