

Cerritos

N

Neighborhood

Watch Report

January 2003

Hardening the Target

Increase your crime prevention awareness

Criminal conduct can often be difficult for a citizen to detect. This month, the Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center offers tips on how to detect behavior that could indicate that a crime is about to occur or is in progress.

Residential burglars

The majority of residential burglaries occur during daytime hours. Burglars are aware that residents are usually away from home during this time. Anyone other than a resident observed in the yard, on the porch, or around any home in your neighborhood warrants your attention. Generally, burglars will attempt to ensure that there is nobody inside a residence before entering. This can be accomplished by knocking on the door, calling out a name or peering into a window. Solicitors and pedestrians should be watched. The backyard provides concealment that is appealing to burglars to facilitate an entry. This is where most residential burglars will enter the home.

Cars driving slowly through your neighborhood or those that are parked on your street that you have not seen before are also important, especially if there is only one occupant such as the driver. This could be the "lookout" for a burglar already inside of a home, and the person responsible for transporting the burglar and the loot away from the scene. Another concern is a stranger talking on a cell phone, as this could be the method to contact a driver in the area and tell him or her that it is safe to pick them up.

Watch what people have in their hands. Any types of bags or containers such as trash bags, pillowcases, boxes, backpacks and gym bags can be used to carry and conceal stolen property. Burglars also like to place as much property as possible in their pockets to avoid suspicion. If you aren't sure that a person belongs in your neighborhood, call the Cerritos Sheriff's Station at once. Jot down a description and the license plate number of any car in question, along with the race, age, clothing and physical descriptions of any people. This will assist deputies in spotting the suspicious persons as they attempt to leave your neighborhood.

Vehicle burglars/auto thieves

In a residential area, the chances of vehicle burglaries and auto thefts occurring greatly increase at night. A common method of selecting a victim, or "casing," is to slowly drive the streets. Suspect vehicles may also travel without headlights in an attempt to not attract attention. Much like residential burglaries, usually one person will drive a car while one or more will attempt to enter a parked car to steal it or remove property. It is not uncommon for a lone vehicle burglar to walk or ride a bicycle as he or she seeks a target.

Telltale signs of a vehicle burglary or auto theft occurring in the night include hearing a vehicle stop and the engine "idling" for a brief period of time. Dogs barking in the neighborhood, any unusual noises, a car burglar alarm or movement outside

of your home should prompt you to at least take a look, if not call the Cerritos Sheriff's Station. A smart thing to do is to look outside through a window to see what you can, then turn on an exterior light. This will most always scare the thief away, and will also provide you with an opportunity to see something that can be reported to the Sheriff's Station. Follow the same steps that were described for identifying a residential burglar by getting as much information as possible on the suspect(s) and their vehicle.

Parking lots present a wide selection of targets for the car thief and vehicle burglar. Always be wary of somebody standing in one position and looking around. This could be an individual "casing" or acting as a lookout for another suspect already inside a nearby vehicle. People walking between cars parallel to the stores may be looking in each to locate items to steal. Another suspicious activity is a driver passing up numerous empty parking stalls and going from aisle to aisle, or stopping in an aisle where there aren't any available stalls. The occupants could be circling to pick up another vehicle burglar. The driver could also be waiting for his or her partner to start up a stolen car and drive away.

The best way to ensure that our neighborhoods and businesses are safe is to report suspicious activity to the Cerritos Sheriff's Station. Your call could make the difference in preventing a crime or facilitating the arrest of a suspect.

Monthly Crime Summary: December 2002

Some 210 Part I felony crimes were investigated by Cerritos Sheriff's deputies in December. The weekly average in 2002 was 358 calls for service.

Seven robbery related incidents were reported in December. On Sunday, December 1 at 10:10 p.m., a male was driving southbound on Carmenita Road at Village Drive when another motorist made a lane change in front of him. The first driver chased the second in an apparent outburst of road rage and finally exited his car to confront the man. The victim was struck in the back of the head and after waking up five minutes later, discovered his wallet and credit cards missing.

On Tuesday, December 3 at approximately 9 p.m., an attempted robbery occurred in the lot of a market located in the 13300 block of Artesia Boulevard. The female victim was seated in her car when she was approached by a woman asking for directions to an address in Orange County. The victim then noticed a male walk up with a handgun. As he was demanding cash, the victim hesitated and both suspects suddenly fled.

On Monday, December 9 at 8 p.m., a woman was placing merchandise in her car in the lot at Bloomfield Avenue and Del Amo Boulevard when a lone male suspect approached her. He reached into her car and removed her purse in a case that was later classified as a grand theft.

On Friday, December 20 at 3 p.m., a male walked up to a woman that had just entered her vehicle in the 11800 block of Del Amo Boulevard. The suspect pushed the victim and demanded her purse. The victim immediately complied and the suspect fled on foot.

On Sunday, December 29 at 10 p.m., two male juveniles struggled with loss prevention personnel at a store in the Los Cerritos Center in an attempt to escape after being detained for shoplifting. Due to the force used in this attempt, the crime was elevated to a robbery. Both

juveniles were arrested and the property was recovered.

The final robbery related incident occurred on Tuesday, December 31 at 5:10 p.m. near 166th Street and Studebaker Road, where a married couple allegedly assaulted the woman's father and took cash. Arrests have been made.

Forty residential burglaries occurred in December, in part because homes are known to contain gifts and other valuable property associated with the holidays. Nearly half of these entries were made possible through open and/or unlocked doors and windows. Eighteen of these crimes occurred during the second week of the month.

An alert neighbor in one area noticed a suspicious vehicle and jotted down a description of it. A deputy patrolling the area observed a car that matched the description. After initiating a vehicle stop, three suspects were arrested and found to be in possession of stolen property, narcotics and other items indicating that they had been responsible for several burglary incidents. After their arrest, the burglary rate dropped back down to the weekly average recorded in 2002.

Three residential burglaries were prevented because homeowners had installed an alarm system. After the burglar(s) had forced entry, an audible alarm sounded, forcing them to flee. This is a good example of how an alarm system is a sound investment for \$20 to \$30 per month. Unfortunately, one homeowner did not set his alarm system, and left the house without securing his windows. He became a victim in part because there was no alarm system sign posted outside to alert the would-be burglar that an attempt to break in would be detected.

Always secure your doors and windows when you leave the house, even if you are only going to be away for a short period of time. Deadbolts and locking pins do not take long to actuate. Also, keep in

mind that burglars are not fond of dogs and alarms.

Cerritos deputies handled 54 vehicle burglary investigations in December. As a rule, burglars force entry into vehicles to retrieve visible items left inside the passenger compartment such as laptop computers, purses, wallets, briefcases, backpacks, camera equipment and high-end stereo components. Do not leave anything of value in your car.

Where you park your vehicle is important as well. In residential areas, if a car is parked in a manner that makes it easily accessible from the street, it becomes more of a target. Often a driver will remain in the suspect's vehicle while one or more will exit and break into the victim's car.

December statistics revealed that the majority of these cases occurred in hours of darkness. If you do not park your car in the garage, which is the safest thing to do, make sure that the distance from the street to your car is the maximum amount possible. Install effective lighting to remove concealment for thieves. Motion sensing floodlights are valuable tools that can be positioned over a wide area. Car alarms are more effective in residential settings, especially at night when it is quieter. This is not always the case in parking lots where we have all become accustomed to hearing them on a more frequent basis.

Vehicle theft crimes were recorded at 47 in December. The locations of these incidents were split evenly between high-volume parking lots and residential neighborhoods. The vehicles of choice for car thieves continue to be Hondas and Toyotas. In all of the car theft cases reported, not one owner indicated that a steering wheel locking device or similar product had been in use at the time of the crime. Research shows that utilizing one of these devices will force a thief to locate another car that does not present as much of a challenge.

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.