

Cerritos

Neighborhood

Watch Report

May 2003

Hardening the Target

Warm weather safety tips offered to residents

As we near the warm summer months, past experience tells us that many Cerritos residents will be inclined to increase the ventilation of their homes without the use of air conditioning. This is a common practice, as energy-conscious Southern Californians seek alternate ways to escape the heat.

Many residents will open the garage door and the inner door to allow a breeze to enter the home. Some have a screen door installed in their garage that enhances circulation. While these methods conserve energy, they also increase one's likelihood of becoming the victim of a crime.

An integral part of the commission of a crime is the opportunity presented to a would-be thief. Leaving a garage door open and unattended creates this essential element. The property crimes made possible by this practice include theft and burglary. A forced entry into the home could also lead to a variety of crimes against the inhabitants.

Not all eventual criminals roam the streets with the specific intention of committing a crime. While they may have the ability to commit a crime, an opportunity presented to them could be the very thing that guides them to the decision to steal. With the contents of your garage visible to all those passing by, you are in fact creating this opportunity.

There have been cases where a suspect abandons a bicycle and steals one from an open garage.

Tools and other valuable items have been taken. There have also been cases where a suspect enters the garage, closes the door and uses the tools inside the garage to penetrate the inner door to a home. This is convenient for the suspect, who is now protected by the concealment of the closed door. Again, the opportunity that you have created can bring out that spontaneous urge in a criminal to steal.

Burglars that "case" neighborhoods for a target will seize any opportunity that presents itself. They have a particular interest in mind. The odds of becoming a victim dramatically increase when you not only give these target-specific criminals the chance to steal, but extend that "invitation" to those that would not normally be so brazen.

Cerritos Sheriff's deputies and Volunteers on Patrol have reported an alarming increase in the amount of garage doors that are left open during the day and night.

In some cases, garage doors are left open all night. Perhaps the residents either forgot to close the doors or left the doors open for a purpose. We have even had some residents who have left their garage doors open so that pets could come and go. Volunteers on Patrol have now been instructed to make contact with residents and encourage better security methods when they observe such conditions.

We urge you to consider the potential consequences of leaving these doors open and unattended.

Even when owners have been in the backyard, there have been incidents where perpetrators entered the garage to steal items. Burglaries can happen that fast.

Make it a point to properly close your garage door if you are not planning on maintaining visual contact with the front of your house. If you see that your neighbor's garage door is open, try to contact them and pass on this important message. If you are unable to contact them, be a vigilant neighbor and keep an eye on their property. You never know when one of the opportunistic would-be thieves will be converted into a spontaneous criminal.

If you do see something suspicious, contact the Cerritos Sheriff's Station right away. To report a crime in progress, or anything that you believe could be a crime in progress, dial 911 immediately.

Log on to the 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: April 2003

Part I felony crimes in the City of Cerritos during the month of April 2003 were recorded at 135 incidents. This is down from 146 incidents reported in March, and can be attributed to a slight reduction in all of the reportable offenses in this summary. Deputies have handled an average of 332 calls for service per week this year compared to 359 per week in 2002.

Robbery related incidents were down from six in March to four investigated by deputies in April. On Saturday, April 5 at 1:26 p.m., a male suspect was observed sitting in a victim's parked vehicle near Studebaker Road and Artesia Boulevard. As the victim approached the vehicle burglar to confront him, two other suspects in a nearby vehicle began yelling for the first suspect to "shoot" the victim. Fearing injury, even though he did not see any weapon, the victim wisely ran away and the suspects fled.

The second case, an attempted robbery, occurred on Sunday, April 6 at 3:45 a.m. as the victim drove southbound on the 16600 block of Carmenita Road. As the victim stopped for a red light, his vehicle was lightly rear-ended by the suspect's car. As they discussed the damage, the suspect placed his hand in a jacket pocket to simulate a weapon and demanded the victim's cash. The suspect fled when a truck approached. It was later learned that the victim had been driving home from a casino, and it is possible that the suspect had followed him.

On Monday, April 7 at 4:14 p.m., a lone suspect entered a business in the 11800 block of Del Amo Boulevard and made a small purchase. When the victim/cashier opened the register to make change, the suspect pushed her back and took money from the open register. The final case occurred on Monday, April 28 at 10:20 p.m. when a male suspect struggled with loss prevention employees outside of a retail store in the Los Cerritos

Mall in an attempt to escape with shoplifted merchandise. The physical force used by the suspect elevated the theft crime to a robbery. The suspect was arrested without further incident.

There were 11 residential burglaries reported to Cerritos Sheriff's deputies in April. This is half of the total investigated in March, which was recorded at 22. The weekly average for these crimes in 2003 at the end of April is 3.5. Bedrooms continue to be the primary target, yielding jewelry, cash and other small concealable items that can be discreetly transported away from the scene. Tools were also frequently stolen. Two emergent patterns were noted in April that allowed the burglar(s) access to the residences involved. The first was open garage doors and the absence of anyone to monitor any entries. Criminals will act upon an opportunity when presented to them (see this month's "Hardening the Target" article). The second pattern was entry to a residence by prying a sliding glass window or door from an area not visible to neighbors, most commonly in the backyard. This can be easily accomplished due to the lack of devices such as locking pins installed on these portals. Such devices secure the sliding portion to the frame and make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to move the windows or doors vertically and laterally.

Vehicle burglaries were also down in April. Forty-eight were investigated last month versus 51 in March. The weekly average in 2003 is nearly 9. High-end car stereos have been the main objects of these crimes in the past, but we have found that an overwhelming majority of cases in April involved items of value left inside of vehicles. Purses, wallets, credit cards, cash, laptop computers, jewelry, briefcases and other visible items have been frequently reported as stolen. While the venue for these crimes in the past has mostly been in high-volume lots, it is now on residential

streets. Cars not parked in garages make them vulnerable to thieves casing neighborhoods. We have also seen garage door openers reported as stolen from vehicles. Keep in mind that these devices can be used to gain entry into your garage. A good practice is to take all items of value, including the garage door opener, into the house when you park the car. Remember, most of these crimes occur in hours of darkness when residents are normally sleeping.

The final category to be reported is vehicle thefts. These are also down from 29 in March to 26 in April. The weekly average in auto thefts has been nearly eight in 2003. Most have occurred in parking lots, and some in residential areas. For the first month in a long time, Honda and Toyota products did not top the list as the most frequently stolen vehicles. Several different makes and models were involved.

There was one case that is noteworthy in that a steering wheel locking device was in use when the car was stolen. The thief was able to break the driver's side window to allow the steering wheel to be turned. When securing these locking devices, make sure that they are positioned against the door to restrict movement. The positive thing in the above case is that due to a tracking system installed in the car, it was quickly recovered with only the broken window and a little less gas.

Visit our new website dedicated to public safety in the City of Cerritos at www.safercerritos.com. There you will find information on crime prevention and disaster preparedness, tips from the Department of Homeland Security on how to protect yourself and your family, and much more. You can also sign up to become a member of the Cerritos Crime Prevention Team (C.C.P.T.) and receive current information on a variety of topics intended to make you better informed and safer as you 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.