

Cerritos

Neighborhood

Watch Report

November 2003

Hardening the Target

Protect yourself during the holiday shopping season

While the holiday season brings joy and cheer, increased shopping and the stockpiling of merchandise in homes can contribute to greater crime during this time of year. The Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center would like to remind residents to take measures to protect themselves and their property as they shop and prepare for the upcoming holiday season.

Retail establishments will see an increase in shopping during this time of year. Unfortunately, criminals recognize the holiday season as a time of great opportunity. Always be aware of your surroundings and try to shop and walk in pairs in parking lots and shopping centers. Statistics indicate that you are far more likely to become a victim if you are by yourself. If you must shop alone, never be afraid to make eye contact with someone. This shows confidence and lessens your chances of becoming a victim. A timid person is more appealing to potential robbers.

Be aware of your surroundings at all times, especially when you are walking outside. Look around frequently and note familiar faces as you move from store to store. This can provide an indication as to whether you are being followed.

If you carry a purse, hold it tight against your body. While you are in a parking lot, consider walking between parked cars. Keep your purse away from passing traffic, as there have been incidents of passengers reaching out from inside a moving vehicle to grab a

purse. Never get too close to a car when an occupant is asking for directions. Always provide yourself with a way out of any area that you may find yourself in.

When inside of a store or in a mall, try to maintain a small space around you. To avoid becoming a victim of a "pickpocket," don't let anyone have physical contact with you.

If you use your credit card, don't lose sight of it. Be aware of the "double scan." This occurs when your card is passed through a credit card scanner more than once. It could be a way of obtaining your credit card number for unlawful use. Don't display the contents of your purse or wallet. Thieves may be watching to see how much cash you have and how easy of a target you would be.

Try not to make frequent trips to your car to place merchandise inside before returning to a store. Thieves watch the parking lots and select desirable victims based on what they see. Never store anything that is visible within the passenger compartment of your vehicle. This is an open invitation to theft.

Finally, always look inside of your car before you get in, and have your key in your hand as you approach it. If there is someone loitering nearby, return to a location where there are many other people and report it to law enforcement, security or store personnel. If something does not look right, act on your instinct and take evasive measures.

The Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center would like to help you steer clear of any undesirable incidents this holiday season. Please be safe and aware, and keep in mind all of these tips as you shop. This knowledge will not only guide you and your loved ones throughout the holiday season, but throughout the entire year as well. For more safety tips, please visit www.safercerritos.com.

Shopping safety points

- Never leave valuable items in your vehicle that can be seen from the outside.
- Place all packages, phones, briefcases, gym bags, CDs, tools and any other valuable items in your trunk.
- Never leave purses exposed in shopping carts.
- When arriving at your vehicle, make your purse the first item you place inside, preferably on the rear seat floorboard.
- Never leave children in your car unattended.
- Be aware of your surroundings as you approach your vehicle, and have your keys in your hand to open your door.
- Shop in pairs if possible, especially after dark.

Monthly Crime Summary: October 2003

There were 136 Part I felony cases handled by the Cerritos Sheriff's Station in October compared to 144 in September. The number of robberies was much lower, but a slight increase was noted in vehicle burglaries. The Cerritos Sheriff's Station has dispatched an average of 356 calls for service per week so far this year. This average is down from 360 calls for service per week during the same period last year.

Robberies

There were only two robbery-related incidents investigated by Cerritos deputies in October, down from 10 in September of this year. This is the lowest amount of robberies for the entire year.

An attempted robbery occurred on Wednesday, October 15 at 10 p.m. when a woman walking to her parked vehicle in a lot near Carmenita Road and South Street was grabbed by a male suspect and pinned against her vehicle. The suspect demanded the victim's car keys, but the victim was able to free herself, climb into her vehicle, lock the doors and use a cell phone to call for help. Employees from a nearby business chased the suspect into a residential area where deputies took him into custody.

On Tuesday, October 21 at 6:30 p.m., a male juvenile befriended another near Bos Street and Gridley Road. After the two conversed, one pulled out a knife and demanded the other's bicycle.

Residential Burglaries

There were 16 residential burglaries reported in October, the same number that occurred in September. Eighteen were investigated in October 2002. The weekly average in 2003 was 3.4 compared to 4.5 one year ago. Property reported stolen included cash, jewelry, computer equipment, handguns, credit cards and personal identification.

Sliding glass doors and windows were the most common points of

entry in these cases, and were the result of prying these portals open from the frame. When secured with locking pins that hold the door or window to the frames, the likelihood of a forced entry becomes virtually non-existent. This forces the burglar to either break the glass and make a great deal of noise or seek another entry point.

Remember that burglars are in a hurry and usually head straight for the bedrooms where the most concealable and expensive property like jewelry and cash is known to be stored. Put valuables in your laundry room, under bathroom sinks, in boxes in the garage or in other out of the way places where hurried burglars would not take the time to search.

Take a brief moment to conduct an "exit security check" to ensure that everything is secure prior to leaving your house. This could make the difference in whether you become a victim or not. Open and unlocked doors and windows are the second most common way that a thief gains entry into homes.

Vehicle Burglaries

Cerritos deputies investigated 43 vehicle burglaries last month compared to 39 in September. The 2003 weekly average in this category was 7.5 at the end of the month. The majority of these crimes occurred in commercial parking lots and were the result of smashed windows. This is directly attributed to items contained within the passenger compartment that were visible from the outside.

The most common method of searching out a target or "casing" it is to walk by cars and peer inside. When an item of value attracts a thief's attention, the window is smashed and the property is quickly removed. This takes only seconds. Items reported stolen in October were consistent with items stolen in previous months and included car stereos, purses, wallets, gym bags, briefcases and cell phones.

While less than 30 percent of the

victims of these crimes reside in Cerritos, if attention is paid to securing visible items in the trunk and out of view, the crime rate in this area will be reduced even more. Holiday shopping brings a greater chance that you will be victimized. Safely secure your valuable items in your vehicle if you must carry them with you in the first place.

Vehicle Thefts

Twenty-nine vehicle thefts were reported to the Cerritos Sheriff's Station in October. There were 36 the month before. Much like vehicle burglaries, commercial parking lots were the crime scene of choice for thieves. We have noted a fluctuation between Hondas and Toyotas dominating the list of stolen cars one week, and other makes and models dominating the list the next. To date, out of 302 stolen vehicles this year, 181 have been recovered. This supports the fact that the majority of cars are stolen for transportation purposes.

It is not uncommon for a thief to abandon a stolen car in a parking lot and take another car from the same lot. Many stolen vehicles are stripped for specific parts and are never recovered. Some are sold after the vehicle identification number (VIN) is switched, and some end up out of the state or country.

Regardless of the type of vehicle you drive, the use of some type of anti-theft device will encourage a would-be thief to bypass your vehicle for another. The more visible the device (such as a steering wheel locking device), the more apparent it will be to a thief that your car will be more difficult to take.

GOT SAFETY?

Informed Citizens are Safer Citizens!

www.safercerritos.com

Safety Contacts:
Community Safety Division -
(562) 916-1266
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To join Cerritos Neighborhood Watch, call Community Mobilization Officer Mike Yach at (562) 916-1258.