

Cerritos

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Neighborhood

Watch Report

October 2003

Hardening the Target

Protect yourself from deceptive and unfair business practices

Recently, the Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center has received complaints from out-of-state people who have been victims of business fraud. The Los Angeles County Department of Consumer Affairs provides information and assistance on laws designed to protect the integrity of the marketplace. The department resolves disputes between businesses and their customers and offers mediation services for resolving disputes between two businesses. It also provides assistance on preparing and presenting a case in Small Claims Court. The services are provided free of charge.

The department has a web site that provides a wealth of information on the full range of free services that are available to consumers. The information covers a variety of laws concerning landlord-tenant and housing issues; automobile sales and purchases; and retail sales, warranties and credit related matters.

You will also find information about the County's complaint handling services, mediation program and Small Claims Court Advisor. To visit the site, log on to <http://consumer-affairs.co.la.ca.us>

Small Claims Court Advisor

Whether you are initiating a lawsuit or defending one, the Department of Consumer Affairs has the information you need. Staff will inform you of the proper court in which to file your action, how to correctly name the other party, what

to bring to court and how to collect your judgment. The Small Claims Court Advisor can be reached at (213) 974-9759.

Dispute Settlement Services

As an alternative to litigation, mediation can resolve a dispute without attorneys' fees, court costs or time that would normally be required to appear in court. This free service uses professionally trained mediators to help parties resolve a dispute. Dispute resolution can be provided if the case involves a customer, business associate or supplier. For more information and assistance, call (213) 974-0825.

Consumer Protection Services

This division counsels and educates businesses and consumers concerning their rights and responsibilities in the marketplace. It investigates and mediates complaints resulting from transactions, and resolves complaints based upon the facts and the application of consumer laws and regulations.

Circumstances surrounding a complaint are always given prime consideration. The division also makes referrals to law enforcement and/or regulatory agencies as appropriate. To contact Consumer Protection Services, call (213) 974-1452.

Real Estate Fraud and Information Program

This area coordinates efforts with government, law enforcement and private industry to detect and prevent real estate fraud. It serves

as a central reporting agency for real estate fraud complaints and prepares selected cases for civil and criminal action by prosecuting agencies. Counseling and information are provided to the public on real estate issues such as home ownership, real estate fraud, foreclosure actions, refinancing, building contractors, home repairs and undeveloped land sales. To access this service, call (800) 973-3370.

Regardless of your status in any business transaction, we encourage you to seek out these free services when you have a question or a dispute with another party. We maintain that informed citizens are safer citizens, and this extends to ensuring that you do not fall victim to a potentially fraudulent situation that places you in the criminal or civil arena. The ramifications of either can put you in a precarious position and end up costing you a great deal of money.

Holiday reminder

The approaching holiday season tends to bring out a multitude of telephone solicitors seeking your contributions to charitable organizations. Please remember to only give to charities that you are familiar with, and to avoid any "hard sales" by callers. Be firm and don't let them intimidate you.

Monthly Crime Summary: September 2003

Cerritos Sheriff's Station personnel recorded 144 Part I felony crimes in the month of September. Compared to the previous month, increases were noted in robberies, residential burglaries and vehicle burglaries. Deputies have handled an average of 355 weekly calls for service to date in 2003.

Robberies

There were nine robbery-related incidents investigated by Cerritos deputies in September, up from seven in August of this year.

The first incident occurred on Saturday, September 6 at 12:30 p.m. when a male entered a bank in the Los Cerritos Center. The suspect presented a note to the teller indicating that a robbery was taking place, and then fled after receiving cash. The FBI is handling this case.

On Wednesday, September 17 at 1:04 a.m., two male suspects confronted two victims behind a restaurant in the 19000 block of Bloomfield Avenue. A gun was simulated and the victims were robbed of their wallets and vehicle. The vehicle was recovered eight blocks away. At 1 p.m. that same day, two suspects approached a victim in a parking structure in the 11800 block of South Street, displayed a handgun and took the victim's wallet and car keys before fleeing in the victim's vehicle. The car was recovered in a nearby jurisdiction, and one of the suspects was arrested.

On Friday, September 19 at 2:55 p.m., two suspects entered a liquor store in the 16400 block of 166th Street and robbed the clerk of money from the cash register. At 8:15 p.m. that evening, a man was about to enter his parked car in the 18000 block of Studebaker Road when a suspect took his wallet and car at gunpoint. The car was recovered three days later. The same suspect took a woman's purse at gunpoint the following day at 2:59 p.m. as she sat in her car in the 11400 block of South Street.

This suspect was arrested after yet another robbery was committed on Monday, September 22 in the 18000 block of Studebaker Road, and was tentatively identified as the second suspect in the parking structure incident on South Street that occurred on September 17.

A shoplifter struggled with store employees on Saturday, September 20 at 3:45 p.m. outside of a business located in the 11900 block of South Street. The suspect was arrested and the property was recovered.

On Tuesday, September 23 at 11:30 p.m., a lone suspect simulated a handgun and robbed a fast food restaurant in the 11400 block of South Street. An attempted bank robbery occurred at 11:42 a.m. in the 18700 block of Gridley Road on Thursday, September 25. The suspect walked up to a teller and announced the robbery. After the teller activated the alarm system, the suspect fled empty handed. Detectives have solid leads and good evidence in both of these two cases.

The last robbery case of the month occurred on Monday, September 29 at 8 p.m. when a male was seen throwing merchandise over a fence into the parking lot connected to a store in the 10900 block of Alondra Boulevard. When the suspect retrieved his vehicle to load the property, he was confronted by loss prevention personnel and began to struggle in an attempt to escape. He ran back into the store to hide, but was later arrested after the burglar alarm system pinpointed his location.

Residential Burglaries

Fourteen residential burglaries were reported in September. This is up from three in August, but down by more than 11 percent over the same period in 2002. No specific area of the City was repeatedly targeted, as the crimes were spread out in various areas. Only two occurred in hours of darkness and

the rest were during the daytime, which is the most common time for residential burglaries. Nearly half of the cases were attributed to open/unlocked doors and windows. Bedrooms were the primary focus. The weekly average in this category has been 3.5 in 2003.

The Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center strongly encourages homeowners to consider installing a burglar alarm that is connected to an alarm company. As we have mentioned in the past, rarely are homes with such alarms targeted by burglars.

Vehicle Burglaries

Cerritos deputies investigated 39 vehicle burglaries in September, up from 20 in August. The 2003 weekly average is 7.6. Visible items continue to dominate the stolen property list. There have also been a few thefts of airbags and DVD players from SUVs. The locations of these crimes were divided between parking lots and residential streets and driveways.

Vehicle Thefts

Thirty-six vehicle thefts were reported in August. This is down from 40 the previous month. We have averaged nearly eight of these crimes per week so far in 2003. The most popular vehicles among thieves were Hondas and Toyotas manufactured from the mid 1980s through the late 1990s.

Check your smoke alarms

Daylight saving time ends on Saturday, October 26. When you set your clocks back one hour, remember to also check the batteries in your smoke alarms at home.

A properly functioning smoke alarm can greatly reduce your risk of dying or being injured in a fire.

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.