

# Cerritos

# Neighborhood

# Watch Report

April 2004

## Hardening the Target

### Protect yourself from identity theft

We have had several requests to reprint information on identity theft. This topic has received a great deal of attention nationwide, as it is one of the fastest growing crimes today. Cerritos residents should be aware of the possibilities of becoming an unsuspecting victim of this potentially devastating crime.

Identity theft, or identity fraud, involves taking and using a victim's identity to obtain credit, steal money, apply for loans, establish accounts with utility companies, rent an apartment, file bankruptcy or obtain a job. Thousands of dollars can be stolen without a victim becoming aware of the problem for months or even years.

An identity thief can obtain your personal information from a variety of sources including your mailbox and your trash. The National Crime Prevention Council offers the following tips to help protect you from becoming a victim of identity theft:

- Never give out personal information over the phone, through the mail, or over the Internet unless you are the one that initiated contact and are aware of the party that you are dealing with. Be cautious of those posing as bank representatives, credit card company personnel and government officials seeking personal information from you. It never hurts to ask for their phone number to verify validity and call them back.
- Obtain and use a paper shredder. Shred any document before

placing it in the trash.

- Avoid using your date of birth, social security number, mother's maiden name or a similar series of numbers as a password. This type of information can easily be obtained from records and used against you.
- Never carry your social security card, passport, birth certificate or other identifying papers with you unless it is absolutely necessary. Also, limit the amount of credit cards that you possess at any given time.
- Never put your social security card number on checks or credit card receipts. If a government agency requests your social security card number, there must be a privacy notice accompanying the request.
- Avoid putting telephone numbers on checks.
- Be careful when using an ATM or phone card that someone is not looking over your shoulder to get your PIN number.
- Make a list of all of your credit card account numbers and bank account numbers with the customer service phone number for each one, and store the list in a safe place.
- When you order a new credit card or are due to receive a replacement, make sure that you receive the card(s) within a reasonable amount of time. If the card does not arrive when expected, call the credit card company immediately to find out if the card has been sent, and to

make sure that the address was not changed to another location.

- Do not use your credit card number on the Internet unless it has been encrypted on a secure site.
- Pay attention to your billing cycles. Follow up with the creditors if a bill does not arrive on time. A missing credit card bill could indicate that a thief has changed the address on the account and may be using your identity.
- Consider canceling all credit cards that you have not used in the past six months. Open credit is a prime target for identity thieves.
- Order and review your credit report at least once a year. Reports should be obtained from all three major credit sources: Equifax (800) 685-1111, Experian (888) EXPERIAN (397-3742) and TransUnion (800) 680-7293.
- To have your name taken off of direct mail lists, write to the Direct Marketing Association, Mail Preference Service, P.O. Box 9008, Farmingdale, NY 11735.

If you become a victim of identity theft, call the Cerritos Sheriff's Station immediately at (562) 860-0044. For more information, visit the National Crime Prevention Council web site at [www.npc.org](http://www.npc.org).

#### Reminder:

It's time to check the batteries in your smoke detectors.

# Monthly Crime Summary: March 2004

There were 136 Part I felony crimes reported to the Cerritos Sheriff's Station in March 2004. This figure is down by nearly five percent compared to the same period in 2003. At the end of March, Cerritos deputies were handling an average of 330 calls for service per week.

## Robberies

There were five robbery-related incidents investigated by Cerritos deputies in March, down from six in February.

On Tuesday, March 2 at 5:10 p.m., a woman was about to enter her vehicle in the 11500 block of South Street when a male suspect pushed her against the car and took her purse.

On Friday, March 12 at 6:20 p.m., two suspects were driving in the Los Cerritos Center parking lot when the passenger leaned out and grabbed the purse of a female victim. The woman slammed into the side of the suspect's vehicle and released the purse.

Another robbery occurred on Saturday, March 13 at 7:20 p.m. at a fast food restaurant in the 11800 block of Del Amo Boulevard. A lone suspect displayed a handgun and demanded cash from the register.

On Tuesday, March 16 at 9:30 p.m., a woman had just returned to her residence in the 19400 block of Allingham Avenue when a suspect

approached demanding her purse. While attempting to evade the suspect, the victim was pushed to the ground and her purse was taken. The purse was recovered in a nearby city where a similar incident was reported approximately 30 minutes later.

The final case occurred on Sunday, March 21 at 4 p.m. when two female suspects removed price tags from clothing items at a retail store located in the 10700 block of South Street. When confronted outside of the store by an employee, one of the suspects pulled a knife from a backpack, and both subsequently fled with the merchandise.

## Residential Burglaries

Nineteen residential burglaries were investigated in March compared to 10 in February. There is an average of three residential burglaries reported each week in Cerritos.

In March, open doors and windows were the point of entry in nearly half of the cases, including open garage doors. Other incidents involved force applied to front and side garage doors that were not equipped with deadbolt locks.

Concealable items such as cash, jewelry and personal identification documents continue to be the most frequently reported loss in residen-

tial burglaries, with bedrooms being the primary target of ransacking. Tools and bicycles were taken from the residences that had open garage doors.

## Vehicle Burglaries

Fifty vehicle burglaries were investigated in March compared to 55 in February. The 2004 weekly average in this category was 10.4 at the end of the month.

Cerritos Sheriff's deputies continue to see a growing number of these cases occurring in residential areas. Victims have been leaving property inside the passenger compartment overnight, which has been the primary target of these crimes. Items such as briefcases, purses, laptop computers, backpacks, wallets, cash, personal identification and stereo components were among the stolen items reported in March.

## Vehicle Thefts

There were 28 vehicle thefts recorded in March, down by two cases compared to February. The 2004 weekly average in vehicle thefts is currently 7.6, down nearly 10 percent compared to the same period one year ago.

Various makes and models comprised the list of stolen vehicles in March, unlike previous reporting periods where Hondas and Toyotas dominated.

## Save the date

The next Crime Prevention Town Hall meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 23 at 7 p.m. at the Cerritos Senior Center (12340 South Street).

Join us for a briefing on local crime trends, crime prevention and disaster preparedness. Cerritos Sheriff's deputies will be on-hand to speak to residents.

For more information, call (562) 916-1245.

## Attend Sheriff's Station Open House

The annual Community Spring Festival and Cerritos Sheriff's Station Open House will be held on Saturday, April 24 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Held in honor of the Cerritos Sheriff's Station Seventh Anniversary, the open house will include displays from the Bomb Squad, Special Enforcement Bureau (S.W.A.T.), Volunteers on Patrol, D.A.R.E. and the Mounted Enforcement Detail. Disaster preparedness information will also be featured.

## Introducing the Virtual Block Club

The Cerritos Crime Prevention Team (CCPT) has been renamed the Virtual Block Club (VBC) to better reflect a Neighborhood Watch program that is accessible via the Internet. Members receive weekly crime information via e-mail including summaries, maps and bulletins.

To join the VBC, visit [www.safercerritos.com](http://www.safercerritos.com) and sign up today. The web site also contains information about crime activities, crime prevention, disaster preparedness and homeland security.

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.