

Cerritos

N

Neighborhood

Watch Report

March 2004

Hardening the Target

Protect yourself against vehicle burglaries in residential areas

In recent months, Cerritos has been experiencing an increase in vehicle burglaries in residential areas. Vehicle burglaries are the most commonly reported crimes in Cerritos and usually involve victims who do not reside in the city. The locations that are generally preferred by vehicle burglars are parking lots, as they offer a large selection of vehicles. Burglars often steal the vehicles' stereo components.

This recent change of venue for vehicle burglaries from parking lots to residential streets predominately affects Cerritos residents. Items

reported stolen include purses, wallets, personal identification, credit cards, cash and jewelry. Unfortunately, these items are left in vehicle passenger compartments overnight, which is a prime time for vehicle burglars to strike. Since most people are sleeping, the chances that a vehicle burglar will be seen during this time are remote. It only takes an instant for a suspect to shatter your window, remove your property and take off in a vehicle, on a bike or on foot.

Once your personal identification information is stolen, you are vulnerable to a variety of crimes

including credit card fraud and identity theft. Protect yourself from being placed in that position by never leaving items of value in the passenger compartment of your vehicle. If you absolutely must store something in the car, place it in the trunk where it cannot be seen or easily removed.

Remember, thieves know that property is commonly left in SUVs without trunks, and that patrons at fitness centers will leave wallets, credit cards and cash in their vehicles. Don't become a victim. Take the necessary steps to help our community "harden the target."

Traffic safety reminders

- When you are stopped at a red light and it turns green, wait for a second or two before you enter the intersection. If a vehicle is going to run a red light, it will almost always do so in the first second or two after the light turns red.
- When making a left turn at an intersection, always yield to vehicles approaching in the opposite direction. Motorcycles can be difficult to see. Left turn accidents are some of the most frequently investigated in Cerritos and could be avoided by drivers paying closer attention.
- Use your turn signals whenever you make a turn or a lane change. Although this sounds rather simple, it could prevent you from being involved in an accident.
- Always leave plenty of distance between your vehicle and the vehicle traveling in front of you. As a general rule, allow one car length for every 10 miles per hour. This will give you enough time to react, brake and stop safely without a collision.
- Be aware of your speed. Speed is almost always related in some way to most accidents. Driving at the posted speed limit will also keep you from getting a citation.
- Do not park in marked fire lanes.
- If you do not have a placard or disabled persons' license plate, do not park in a stall designated for disabled parking only. The fine is more than \$300, and your vehicle may be towed away.

Attend CERT training

Cerritos residents ages 18 and older are invited to attend Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training offered by the City of Cerritos. Training will be offered on three consecutive Saturdays, April 24 through May 8 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Cerritos Sheriff's Station. First aid and basic disaster medical operations, light search and rescue, light fire suppression techniques and disaster management will be covered.

Training is free and will be conducted by the Los Angeles County Fire Department in conjunction with the City of Cerritos. For more information, call (562) 916-1254 or log on to www.ci.cerritos.ca.us.

Monthly Crime Summary: February 2004

There were 97 Part I felony crimes investigated in February. This is down from 112 cases reported in January. A reduction in robberies and other structure burglaries was responsible for the lower number of crimes in February. At the end of February, Cerritos deputies had handled an average of 328 calls for service per week.

Robberies

There were six robbery-related incidents investigated by Cerritos deputies in February, down from 10 in January.

An attempted robbery occurred on Wednesday, February 4 at 8:54 p.m. when a 63-year-old male victim was walking near Gridley Park in the 11500 block of Bertha Street. Three teenage suspects on bicycles rode up to the victim and one of them produced a handgun and demanded money. After the victim told them that he did not have any money, they rode away.

A carjacking took place on Thursday, February 5 at 9:05 a.m. in a parking lot located at Bloomfield Avenue and Del Amo Boulevard. A description of the suspect provided by the victim matched an individual who had been questioned by a Lakewood deputy only a few minutes prior to the robbery. When the crime broadcast was sent over the radio, the Lakewood deputy contacted Cerritos deputies, and the information they shared enabled detectives to capture the suspect the following day.

Another robbery occurred at 10:53 p.m. in a parking lot at the Los Cerritos Center on Friday, February 6. The victim was negotiating the purchase of a car with two men in the parking lot and held out \$2,000 cash in an apparent show of good faith. Upon doing so, one of the suspects took the money, kicked the victim and fled.

On Saturday, February 14 at 6:10 p.m., a lone suspect entered a drugstore in the 17500 block of

Carmenita Road and approached an employee with merchandise at a cash register. When the employee opened the register to make change, the suspect displayed a handgun and started grabbing money. He fled when customers began yelling at him and was arrested a few days later. He admitted committing additional robberies at other drugstores in various jurisdictions.

On Sunday, February 15 at 5:45 a.m., two suspects forced two victims to open a safe and cash register at gunpoint at a fast food business in the 11400 block of South Street.

Later that same night, a male victim was standing in his driveway talking on a cell phone in the 12300 block of Andy Street when a male on a scooter dismounted, approached the victim and demanded the cell phone. The victim pulled away and went inside the residence, and the suspect fled.

Residential Burglaries

Ten residential burglary incidents were reported in February, which is down from 14 investigated in January. The 2004 weekly average in this category is currently 2.8.

Daytime was the most common period for residential burglaries to occur, with open doors and windows being the most common method of entry. Victims reported leaving garage doors open overnight, resulting in the loss of tools, bicycles and auto parts. One victim had a functioning alarm system, but failed to activate it upon leaving the home. Cash, credit cards and jewelry were once again the main focus of burglars ransacking master bedrooms.

Vehicle Burglaries

Vehicle burglaries rose from 44 in January to 50 in February. The weekly average has been 10.6 in 2004. While stereo components are frequently the target of vehicle burglaries, visible items within the passenger compartment of vehicles are the primary target of thieves. As

reported last month, many of these cases are occurring in residential neighborhoods where vehicles are left outside overnight with items such as purses, wallets, laptop computers and briefcases inside. Thieves will immediately take and use any credit cards, and a victim's vulnerability to identity theft automatically increases when personal identification is left visible inside a vehicle. (See this month's article entitled "Hardening the Target" on the other side of this report).

Vehicle Thefts

Thirty-four vehicle theft events were reported in February, up three cases compared to the previous month. Currently there is an average of 8.1 vehicle thefts investigated each week in 2004. While Hondas and Toyotas are generally the types of vehicles most often stolen, various makes and models were targeted in February. Parking lots are the locations most commonly reported as crime scenes for vehicle thefts.

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, use some type of anti-theft device such as a steering wheel locking device, fuel restriction device or global positioning system to discourage would-be thieves from targeting your vehicle.

Please visit our web site dedicated to public safety in the City of Cerritos. Go to www.safercerritos.com to obtain information on crime prevention and disaster preparedness. You can also become a member of the Cerritos Crime Prevention Team (C.C.P.T.) and receive information on a variety of topics to help make you better informed and safer in Cerritos.

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.