

Cerritos Neighborhood Watch Report

December 2008

Hardening the Target

Investigate charities before donating

During the holiday season, many people are in the spirit of giving, and criminals are more than willing to do the taking. Though there are many legitimate charities, criminals pretend to be from charities as well. The following tips are offered when considering a charitable donation:

- Be aware of charities soliciting personal information on the phone or by mail. This information can be used to deplete savings accounts, "max out" credit cards, and could ultimately lead to identity theft.
- Before you make a donation, check out the charity. If you do not recognize the name of the charity, do some research before donating or pledging money.
- Ask for written information, or consider only dealing with charities that you are familiar with. Legitimate charities will gladly send you information and will never insist that you donate immediately.
- If the caller is from a professional fundraising group, ask how much of the donation actually goes to the charity and how much the fundraising group keeps. You may prefer to give directly to the charity.
- Remember, you are the one making the donation and you have every right to obtain information and to control the way you donate.

Be cautious when revealing your credit card verification code (CVC)

A credit card verification code (CVC) is the last three digits on the back of a MasterCard or Visa card in the signature strip. American Express cards have a four-digit CVC on the front side of the card above the card number.

When you order something online, you are frequently asked for the CVC code. This is to ensure that you have the card in your possession and that someone is not using a credit card number obtained from the theft of mail, a receipt or some other illegitimate source.

A common scam to obtain one's CVC code involves a person representing a security or fraud investigator from your credit card company. (This scam is gaining popularity in Cerritos). The caller will ask you about a fraudulent purchase in an attempt to gain your trust, and then ask you a series of questions, including asking you for the CVC code. Once you provide this information, the thief can make purchases with your credit card number.

If you receive a call like this, always call your credit card company's toll-free number before you provide any information. Make sure that the caller gives you a name or operator number so you will know whom to contact. If the call is a scam, the thief will not be able to provide the correct contact information, and you will have avoided potential identity theft!

Avoid a vehicle burglary by securing your GPS unit

Global Positioning Satellite (GPS) units are disappearing from vehicles at an alarming rate. Although many people leave items such as laptop computers, cell phones and MP3 players on seats, in center consoles, or on floorboards that can easily be seen when someone looks into the vehicle, GPS units mounted on the dashboard or windshield offer a clear view to a thief who is simply driving by. By remaining in the moving vehicle until a GPS unit is spotted, the criminal can cover more ground in a shorter period of time. When the thief sees a visible GPS unit, he or she smashes the window and steals the GPS unit.

The Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center would like to remind residents that if they make an opportunity available for a thief, chances are high that it will be taken. Make sure that you lock all valuables, including GPS units, in the trunk of your vehicle or take them with you if you do not have secure trunk space.

The vehicle burglary rate in Cerritos has continued to climb this year and these highly visible GPS units have contributed to that increase. Don't be a victim. Take the time to properly secure your property so it will be there upon your return. That includes your GPS unit.

Monthly Crime Summary: November 2008

Cerritos Sheriff's Station personnel investigated 133 Part I felony crimes in November, down from 146 in October. Residential and vehicle burglaries increased while robberies and vehicle thefts decreased. At the end of November, deputies were handling a weekly average of 319 calls for service.

Robberies

There were seven robbery incidents investigated by Cerritos deputies in November, down from an adjusted total of 10 in October.

An ex-boyfriend forced a female victim into his car in the 16600 block of Edwards Road on Monday, November 10 at 7:50 a.m. and took her ID and credit cards.

On Tuesday, November 11 at 7:10 p.m. a male suspect attempted to leave a store in the 10700 block of South Street and fought with loss prevention personnel in an attempt to flee. The suspect was ultimately arrested.

The third case occurred on Wednesday, November 12 at 8:08 p.m. when two male suspects entered a sandwich shop in the 17700 block of Norwalk Boulevard and

ATM Safety

The following ATM safety tips are offered:

- Prepare any deposit slips before going to an ATM.
- Shield the keypad with your hand or body when entering your personal identification number (PIN).
- Do not leave your transaction record behind at the ATM.
- If you use a drive-up ATM, make sure your car's windows are rolled up and the doors are locked.
- Always be aware of your surroundings. If you notice anything suspicious, use another ATM or return later. If you absolutely must use an ATM at night, consider taking someone with you.

robbed employees and a customer.

Two gun-wielding male suspects robbed a gas station in the 12100 block of Artesia Boulevard on Tuesday, November 18 at 8:08 p.m. One suspect is in custody.

At 5:20 the following afternoon, two suspects struggled with an employee while attempting to steal beer from a liquor store in the 16400 block of Norwalk Boulevard. One of the suspects has been identified.

Another robbery occurred outside of a department store in the Los Cerritos Center on Sunday, November 23 at 3:20 p.m. when a male suspect fought with loss prevention personnel after shoplifting merchandise.

On Saturday, November 29 at 12:01 a.m. two male suspects produced a gun and robbed a Los Cerritos Center store employee of a money bag containing the store's deposit.

Residential Burglaries

Twenty residential burglaries were logged in November, up by two crimes from October. Open/unlocked doors or windows provided access for 12 of the crimes. Windows were pried in seven incidents and one

window was smashed. Items reported stolen included handguns, jewelry, cash, laptop computers, TVs, cameras and credit cards. The 2008 weekly average in residential burglaries was 3.1 at the end of November.

Vehicle Burglaries

Forty-four vehicle burglaries were investigated in November, compared to 35 in October. High-volume commercial parking lots were involved in 28 cases. SUVs were burglarized in 21 of the cases, 15 GPS units were stolen and nine stereos were taken. Other property reported stolen included clothing, cologne, purses, wallets, cash, passports, blankets, golf clubs and cell phones. The weekly average in vehicle burglaries at the end of October was 7.8.

Vehicle Thefts

Vehicle thefts dropped from 34 in October to 17 in November. Fifteen were taken from high-volume commercial parking lots. Eight SUVs, six Hondas, and one Toyota were taken. The 2008 weekly average in vehicle thefts was 5.3 at the end of November.

Protect your property by recording serial numbers

Many products contain a serial number, including electronics, tools and cameras. The serial number can be stamped on a plate and attached to the item, indented in plastic or printed on a tab that sticks on the item. In addition to identifying an item, these numbers are also vital to law enforcement.

A national system exists where property can be entered into an automated database when it is reported stolen. When a peace officer wants to confirm the status of an item bearing a serial number, that information is input into the system. If the item shows up in the system as stolen, the person in possession of the item can be arrested.

Be prepared to furnish product se-

rial numbers in the event that items are stolen. Maintain a separate file containing a description of the item, brand name, model number, and serial number to increase your chances of having that property returned to you if it is taken. Update this list whenever a new item is received.

California law prohibits anyone from buying, selling, receiving, concealing or possessing any item where the manufacturer's serial number, identification number, or any other distinguishing number or marking has been removed, altered, defaced or covered. Keep this in mind during a transaction and make sure that the item and the receipt bear the same serial number.

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