

# Cerritos Neighborhood Watch Report

February 2009

## Hardening the Target

### Beware of property tax scam

The Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Division would like to warn residents about a property tax scam that has been gaining popularity in recent months.

The Los Angeles County Assessor's office reports that various private companies are sending mailings to property owners offering their services to pursue a reduction in their property taxes. These companies may charge hundreds of dollars to file for a reduction in the property value on behalf of the property owner. Some companies are even imposing late fees if the application is received after an arbitrary deadline. Be aware that solicitations from private companies offering to pursue a reduction in property taxes must clearly indicate that they are not a government agency and that their

services are not approved or endorsed by any government agency. Failure to provide such notice is a violation of California law.

If you or someone you know receives an illegal solicitation, please contact the Los Angeles County Department of Consumer Affairs at (800) 973-3370 or visit [www.dca.lacounty.gov](http://www.dca.lacounty.gov).

Property owners may receive legal solicitations from private companies that properly identify themselves as not being government agencies. However, in 2009, the Assessor's Office will be reviewing over 500,000 single family houses and condos that were purchased between July 2003 and June 2008. In some areas, earlier purchases will also be assessed. There is no charge for the review.

All 500,000 owners whose homes are scheduled to be reviewed will receive a letter by the end of June notifying them of the results. Owners who disagree with the results of the review or were not included in the review may file a Decline-In-Value application through December 31. The Decline-In-Value form is simple to complete and is readily available online or at one of the Assessor's District Offices. The Assessor's office will review the application and if a reduction is warranted, the taxable value will be reduced. Owners are urged to wait until July to decide whether to file a Decline-In-Value application.

For more information, contact the Los Angeles County Department of Consumer Affairs at (800) 973-3370 or visit [www.dca.lacounty.gov](http://www.dca.lacounty.gov).

### Scam artists frequently target the elderly

During January, the family of an elderly Cerritos resident contacted the Cerritos Sheriff's Station to report an alleged scam.

After an investigation, it was determined that an acquaintance of the victim and a second man, who claimed to be an attorney, convinced the victim she would receive a portion of a million-dollar worker's compensation settlement. Over a period of two years the victim gave cash to the suspects on 30 occasions, eventually totaling over \$200,000. Investigators learned there was no worker's compensation claim and no attorney

with the given name. One of the suspects has since been arrested.

Unfortunately, seniors are frequently targeted in scams like these in which the underlying motivation is to get something for free, or in the described case, a maximum yield for a minimal contribution.

If there is a senior in your life, don't be afraid to start a discussion about scams and their warning signs, which may include excessive phone calls, an offer of a free prize, unusual quantities of magazines, correspondence from unfamiliar charities, or visits by strangers. Also be aware of payments

made to, or calls received from, organizations that offer to assist in the recovery of funds, or that charge for services that are normally free.

Seniors are often vulnerable because they are polite and unwilling to cut a conversation short, and may lack the experience to avoid becoming a victim. If credit card or account information has been furnished during a transaction, contact the financial institution and have the information changed to prevent future abuse. If you suspect fraud, notify the Cerritos Sheriff's Station immediately.

# Monthly Crime Summary: January 2009

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Cerritos Sheriff's Station personnel investigated 125 Part I felony crimes in January, down from 135 in December. Increases over the previous month were noted in residential burglaries and vehicle thefts, while robberies and vehicle burglaries decreased. Field deputies handled an average of 308 calls for service per week in the first month of 2009. The average at the end of 2008 was 296.

## Robberies

There were three robberies investigated by Cerritos deputies in January, compared to eight in December.

On Thursday, January 8 at 7:50 p.m. a male suspect displayed a handgun and robbed a fast-food restaurant in the 11800 block of Del Amo Boulevard.

Two teenaged suspects attempted to return merchandise at a store in the Los Cerritos Center on Sunday, January 11 at 5 p.m. When employees discovered the items had been

stolen from the Lakewood Mall a struggle ensued and an employee was assaulted by the fleeing suspects. Both suspects were arrested shortly after the incident.

On Thursday, January 22 at 1 p.m. a male shoplifting suspect fought with loss prevention personnel in an attempt to escape from a store in the Towne Center. The suspect was quickly taken into custody.

## Residential Burglaries

Nineteen residential burglaries were reported in January, up from 15 in December.

Open/unlocked doors or windows were the entry points in six of the crimes. Pried windows were used to gain entry in seven incidents. One case was attributed to a shattered window, and another to a side garage door that was kicked in. Items reported stolen included wallets, laptop computers, TVs, jewelry, stereo items and purses. The new

2009 weekly average in residential burglaries is 3.

## Vehicle Burglaries

Vehicle burglaries decreased in January, as 30 were reported compared to 53 in December. Twenty-six of the crimes in January occurred in high-volume commercial parking lots. Twenty-two SUVs were targeted and GPS units were taken from three vehicles. Victims reported the loss of tools, wallets, purses, checkbooks, MP3 players, ID and keys. The weekly average in vehicle burglaries is now 8.8.

## Vehicle Thefts

Vehicle thefts increased slightly in January. Twenty-seven cases were recorded versus 24 in December. Twenty-four vehicles in the January crimes were taken from high-volume commercial parking lots. Ten SUVs and 14 Hondas were stolen. The new 2009 weekly average in vehicle thefts is 7.

## Tips for keeping your on-line purchases and information safe

The sale of items on the Internet is an accepted and widely used shopping experience for millions of consumers. At the same time, there are stories of hacker attacks and credit card theft, leading some to believe that Internet shopping may not be safe.

For the most part, Internet shopping is safe. There are a few instances of theft and hacking that make the front-page news, but these instances are not a significant problem. There is a far greater risk of having your credit card information stolen when you use your card for payment of routine services at reputable establishments such as restaurants, gas stations and the local mall.

A variety of items can be purchased from the Internet without major problems. The public has become aware of the convenience,

savings, and speed of the Internet shopping experience. Most items are received in two to three days at your doorstep in good condition and exactly as advertised. By following a couple of prudent safeguards, an Internet shopping experience can be rewarding.

The following tips are offered to help you reduce your risks when shopping on-line.

- Always pay by credit card instead of a debit card or a personal check. With a credit card, your exposure to loss is limited to \$50. With a debit card your exposure to loss is \$500, and in some cases, has no limit. NEVER pay by personal check on-line because it provides too much of your banking information to the company.
- Even where there are adequate protections against misuse of

your account, your good credit can be harmed or destroyed if your information is stolen, and it can take a substantial amount of time to repair all of your banking and credit records, and recover from your financial loss. There are other Internet options, including paying by digital currency, but these options are still emerging.

- Check the on-line store's policy for returning merchandise and obtaining refunds. At this time, many Internet shopping sites have sub-standard return policies. Read the return policy and understand it before ordering items.
- Never click on ads that offer free gifts or other items to download unless you know and trust the source. If clicked, these ads could download a virus on your computer without you realizing it.

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Safety Contacts:  
Community Safety Division -  
(562) 916-1266  
Sheriff's Station - (562) 860-0044



To join Cerritos Neighborhood Watch, call the Cerritos Sheriff's Station/Community Safety Center at (562) 916-1266.