

# Cerritos Neighborhood Watch Report

July 2009

## Hardening the Target

### Gangs in Jamaica target Americans with fraudulent lottery scams

Scam artists are making Jamaica a new center for internationally known lottery schemes, aiding a network of violent gangs that authorities say are putting money into drug and gun trafficking. Americans sent more than \$30 million to Jamaica last year to claim winnings in these schemes.

The United States and Jamaica are now teaming up for a task force dedicated to breaking up the cross-border schemes.

"It's just an incredible amount of money that's coming down here," said Vance Callender, an Immigration and Customs Enforcement attache at the U.S. Embassy in Kingston. "We've got cases from Honolulu to Maine."

The scams were originally made famous by criminals in Nigeria. In most cases, a caller will say you have won millions in an overseas lottery, but you must wire a few hundred dollars overseas to cover the taxes. People who pay are then asked to provide more money. As victims try to recover their losses, scammers will even pose as police and say they need cash to aid in the investigation of the scam.

The schemes prey on victims who are often elderly. Callender said his office is working with more than a dozen people who each have lost more than a half million dollars.

The Jamaican scams, which target the United States more than any other country, have grown dramatically over the last two years.

Leslie Green, an assistant police commissioner, said gangs appear to be seeking new sources of revenue in response to a crackdown on drug trafficking.

The new task force will seek the extradition of key suspects for trial in the United States, Callender said. It will also try to return money to victims from cash seized as it comes into Jamaica and by liquidating criminal assets.

Already, United States agents have started intercepting payments from victims, according to Callender. He said \$30 million is a conservative estimate of how much scammers took from Americans last year.

For the victims, the losses have severe consequences.

A Houston man in his 80s recently lost \$121,000 — nearly all of his family's savings.

#### Know the warning signs

When you send money to people you do not know personally or give personal or financial information to unknown callers, you increase your chances of becoming a victim of telemarketing fraud.

If a caller says any of the following, the offer may be a scam:

- "You must act 'now' or the offer won't be good."
- "You've won a 'free' gift, vacation, or prize. But you have to pay for postage and handling or other charges."
- "You must send money, give a credit card or bank account

number, or have a check picked up by courier." You may hear this before you have had a chance to consider the offer carefully.

- "You don't need to check out the company with anyone." The caller may say you do not need to speak to anyone including your family, lawyer, accountant, local Better Business Bureau, or consumer protection agency.
- "You don't need any written information about our company or our references."
- "You can't afford to miss this 'high-profit, no-risk' offer."

If you hear these — or similar — "lines" from a telephone salesperson, just say "no thank you" and hang up the phone.

#### Avoid telephone fraud

It's very difficult to get your money back if you've been cheated over the phone. To avoid telephone fraud, the following tips are offered:

- Don't pay for a "free prize." If a caller tells you the payment is for taxes, he or she is violating federal law.
- Don't buy from an unfamiliar company. Legitimate businesses understand that you want more information about their company and are happy to comply.
- Always ask for and wait until you receive written material about any offer or charity.
- Always check out unfamiliar companies with your local con-

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# Monthly Crime Summary: June 2009

Part I felony crime investigations for Cerritos Sheriff's Station dropped from 116 crimes in May to 102 in June. Vehicle thefts and vehicle burglaries increased in May while robberies and residential burglaries decreased. At the end of June, field deputies were handling a weekly average of 319 calls for service.

## Robberies

There was one robbery incident investigated by Cerritos deputies in June, compared to three in May.

A woman who had been walking with a bank deposit bag threw it upon seeing a male suspect running toward her on Monday, June 8 at 11:15 a.m. The man picked up the bag and fled. This incident occurred in a lot at Artesia Boulevard and

## Prevent a residential burglary

Many residents open windows and doors to ventilate their homes in warm weather. However, this provides a would-be thief with the opportunity to inventory your belongings or even gain access to your home. Leaving a second-story window open is also a risk. Burglars often use the easiest point of entry to get inside a home, and an open window or door provides them with the perfect opportunity.

In addition, be present when your garage door is open. Many thieves are capable of stealing property in a very short amount of time. People who are walking or driving by a residence can obtain items in seconds. A thief can also steal a garage door opener from your vehicle. Even worse, a burglar could enter a garage, close the door and have more than enough time to pry open the inner door to a residence while remaining hidden from the street. If you need to ventilate your garage, remain inside of the garage or in the front yard where activities can be monitored.

If you see a suspicious individual, call the Cerritos Sheriff's Station immediately at (562) 860-0044.

Norwalk Boulevard.

## Residential Burglaries

Eleven residential burglaries were logged in June, compared to 13 in May. Open or unlocked doors or windows were used as the entry points in four cases, two victims reported windows pried, one had a shattered window, and four cases resulted from doors being kicked in. TVs, plumbing accessories, gold bars, cash and jewelry were among the stolen items.

The 2009 weekly average in residential burglaries was 2.3 at the end of the month.

## Vehicle Burglaries

Forty-three vehicle burglaries were investigated in June, up from 36 in May. Thirty of the vehicles

were burglarized in high-volume commercial parking lots. SUVs were targeted 22 times in June, GPS units were taken from 11 vehicles, and stereo items were removed in seven incidents. Stolen property included chrome molding, a battery, CDs, wallets, purses, golf clubs, ID, credit cards, ceiling fans and cameras. The 2009 weekly average in vehicle burglaries is now 8.3.

## Vehicle Thefts

Vehicle thefts rose from 10 in May to 19 in June. Thirteen of the vehicles were stolen from high-volume commercial parking lots. Seven SUVs, six Hondas, one Toyota and a commercial trailer were stolen. The new 2009 weekly average in vehicle thefts is 5.3.

## Fraudulent lottery scams

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sumer protection agency, Better Business Bureau, state Attorney General, the National Fraud Information Center, or other watchdog groups. Unfortunately, not all bad businesses can be identified through these organizations.

- Obtain a salesperson's name, business identity, telephone number, street address, mailing address, and business license number before you transact business. Some con artists give out false names, telephone numbers, addresses, and business license numbers.
- Before you send money, ask yourself a simple question. "What guarantee do I really have that this solicitor will use my money in the manner we agreed upon?"
- Never pay in advance for services. Pay for services only after they are delivered.
- Some con artists will send a messenger to your home to pick up money, claiming it is part of their service to you. In reality, they are taking your money without leaving any trace of who

they are or where they can be reached.

- Always take your time making a decision. Legitimate companies won't pressure you to make a snap decision.
- It's never rude to wait and think about an offer. Be sure to talk over big investments offered by telephone salespeople with a trusted friend, family member, or financial advisor.
- Never respond to an offer you don't understand thoroughly.
- Never send money or give out personal information such as credit card numbers and expiration dates, bank account numbers, dates of birth, or social security numbers to unfamiliar companies or unknown persons.
- Know that your personal information is often brokered to telemarketers through third parties.

If you receive a call with an offer that you believe is fraudulent, contact the Cerritos Sheriff's Station at (562) 860-0044. If at all possible, check for any phone number that may be displayed on caller ID, write it down, and provide the number to law enforcement.

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.