

Cerritos Neighborhood Watch Report

February 2014

Hardening the Target

Another Day, Another Scam

Last month an 88-year-old Cerritos resident received a frantic telephone call from someone claiming to be his nephew. The caller advised our elderly resident that he had been in a terrible traffic accident in Denver and needed money to pay his medical bill and cover his legal costs. Being a bit suspicious and because he hadn't talked to the nephew in several years, he asked a couple of personal questions that the caller was able to plausibly answer. He then quickly wired \$1,670 to an account as directed by the nephew. About six hours later our resident received another call from someone claiming to be the nephew's attorney. The attorney requested an additional \$1,670 to handle his court fee. Our resident never hesitated and the funds were quickly shot off into cyberspace. When he received a third call early the next morning from a woman affiliated

with the attorney who requested additional funds, our resident became suspicious and called his nephew. That's when he learned that his nephew had not been in a traffic accident, had not been arrested, and had never been to Denver.

The grandmother/father scam has been around for a long time, but it still works periodically. Thieves can obtain a lot of personal information on the Internet that people willingly post about themselves. With a bit of work a savvy thief can learn enough to convince some people, especially older folks, that they are a relative and in urgent need of financial help. Usually the scenario involves needing bail money in some foreign country, but there are countless variations on the story and all believable enough that people easily fall victim to this scam.

To reduce your risk, talk to family

and friends and let them know that this scam is out there and people are falling for it, especially if you have family members who live or travel out of state or the country. Some experts recommend setting up code words in advance that can be used to verify if a call is actually from a family member. Seniors are often targeted by scammers, so certainly mention this scam to older friends and family members. If you do receive this call, take the time to verify some of the details, make telephone calls, and advise other family members about the request. Ask the caller questions about yourself that are unlikely to be on the Internet but that a family member would know. No incident is so urgent that you can't take a little time to investigate. Be aware and be protected because tomorrow it'll be another day, and another scam.

Monthly Crime Summary: January 2014

There were 91 Part I felony crimes reported in January. This figure is an increase of 14 from the previous month. The following is a quick summary of the monthly Part I totals by category: seven robberies, 14 residential burglaries, six commercial/school burglaries; two fitness center locker burglaries; 27 vehicle burglaries; 19 grand thefts; 15 stolen vehicles and one attempt; and finally, one aggravated assault involving an 11-year-old boy, his brother and his mother.

Robberies

Three of last month's robberies involved suspects with guns; one was

what is termed a "strong-arm" robbery; one involved bodily force; two were shoplifting crimes that turned into robberies when the suspect resisted arrest and fought with loss prevention officers; and the final robbery was a shoplift that was classified as a robbery when the suspect threatened the store manager before she fled with various items. On January 16 the same suspect used a gun to rob the Payless Shoe Source at the Towne Center and a couple of hours later the CVS on South Street. Cash and other items were stolen. This same suspect has been quite active, committing

robberies not only in Cerritos, but also in Anaheim and Fullerton. The good news is that this suspect was caught a few days later by Cypress Police Department officers and is now awaiting trial. The other robbery involving a handgun occurred at the car wash on Pioneer Boulevard on the evening of January 18. A Lakewood resident was washing his car when he was approached by a man in a hoodie who presented a handgun and demanded money. The victim gave the suspect \$30 and the suspect then ran away north on Pioneer. This suspect was

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Monthly Crime Summary: January 2014

Continued from the other side

subsequently identified by detectives from the Sheriff's Major Crimes Bureau and has been arrested. On January 30 a Dollar Tree employee was walking to a bank on Gridley Road to make a deposit when he was punched in the head and knocked to the ground. The suspect grabbed the bag and fled. This suspect is still outstanding. On January 4 a woman entered the Target store on South Street and took three cell phones and exited the premises. When confronted by a loss prevention officer a fight ensued that resulted in the suspect being detained and arrested for robbery. Two days later at the same store three suspects, two women and a man, stole clothing valued at \$250 and left. When loss prevention officers attempted to detain the suspects in the parking lot the male suspect pulled out a can of pepper spray and threatened the officers. These three suspects ran from the location and fled in a vehicle. Sheriff's detectives were able to track down one of the female suspects and are still actively pursuing the other two. The final robbery occurred at Babies 'R' Us on South Street when a customer took some items and walked out of the store. The suspect threatened the manager when she intervened and then fled.

Residential Burglaries

Fourteen residential burglaries were reported in January, which is an increase from the 11 reported in December, but still a nice decline from the 25 reported last November. Perhaps the most notable of these burglaries was the one reported on January 3 that resulted in the arrest of two gangsters from Los Angeles. A resident was home but didn't respond when someone knocked at her door. When the suspect began kicking her side garage door she quickly called 9-1-1 and deputies soon arrived to arrest the two suspects. The other notable incident was a distraction burglary. In another interesting case, a "landscaper" asked a resident to step into her backyard

so he could inspect the trees in her neighbor's yard that he was supposedly trimming. Once in the rear yard his accomplice entered the front door and stole items from a bedroom. Ten of the 14 burglaries were committed during the week, and almost all during daytime hours. Entrance into homes was through rear windows, sliding doors, and on two occasions front doors were kicked in. Losses included money, jewelry, an iPad, cameras and computers. Two burglaries were committed while homes were tented for termites. Please keep in mind that our Sheriff's Special Assignment Officers have alarms that they will install for residents when their homes are being fumigated. Please contact the station at (562) 860-0044 for information.

Commercial/Other Structure Burglaries

Six burglaries were also reported in January that did not involve residential structures. Two people had wallets and cell phones stolen from lockers at the L.A. Fitness on Alondra Boulevard. (We recommend that if possible, take only your driver's license to the gym or park when exercising.) One of these burglaries actually involved the arrest of a forgery suspect at a bank on Artesia Boulevard, and another involved breaking a window at the Radio Shack in the Towne Center, but nothing was taken. A finance company on Artesia Boulevard reported the loss of \$27,000 in checks and cash when a suspect shattered a window during the hours the business was closed. A resident lost musical equipment when a suspect broke into a rear yard storage shed. Finally, Valley Christian High School reported the theft of two pitching machines from a storage shed and a suspect entered a kitchen at Cerritos High School. Like most high school students, this suspect found nothing appealing in the kitchen so nothing was stolen.

Vehicle Burglaries

There were 27 vehicle burglaries in January which is a significant increase from the 14 reported in December.

We had 25 reported last November. Days of the week and times varied, as did the locations. Ten of the vehicle burglaries occurred in residential areas and the other 17 in commercial or public parking lots. Only one of the vehicle burglaries occurred at the mall, which is noteworthy given the large volume of cars that park at that location. Losses included five purses, four backpacks, an iPad, three wallets, sunglasses, a camera, a guitar, and various amounts of cash. One daring thief with no conscience even stole a Bible from a car parked on Gerritt Avenue.

Vehicle Thefts

Fifteen vehicles were stolen last month, plus another vehicle that someone tried but failed to steal at Los Cerritos Center. All but four occurred in commercial or public parking lots. The mall was again a really safe place on a per-capita basis. In addition to the attempt to steal a Chevy pickup on January 14, it's possible the frustrated thief returned because a second Chevy pickup was targeted on January 30 at about 4 p.m. This time our car thief was successful. Most vehicles stolen were older models, ranging from Hondas to Fords. A newer model Chevy Cruze was stolen as was a newer Hyundai. A Tahoe and two utility vans were also targeted.

Grand Thefts

Grand thefts totaled 19 last month and ranged from metal valves worth \$20,000 stolen from a commercial development on Artesia Boulevard to a ring valued at \$4,000 stolen from a home on Palo Verde Avenue. A UPS delivery of computer items was stolen from a front porch on Hart Place, and an expensive camera lens was stolen by someone asking to use the restroom in a photo business at the mall. Suspects are rarely arrested for these various thefts, so it is always important to take appropriate security measures to protect your property. And remember, the best way to put burglars and thieves out of business is when you "see something, say something."

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.