

You don't have to be a crime victim

As 2014 begins to wind down, this is a good time to provide information to Cerritos residents about three crimes that have been occurring on a regular basis since the beginning of the year. During September in particular, there was a significant increase in these common thefts. Despite the valiant efforts of our Sheriff's deputies and detectives, they are powerless to prevent these crimes from happening. The good news is that there are some easy steps that Cerritos residents can take to guarantee they will never become victims of these crimes.

The first of these easily preventable crimes is the cash card scam that seems to be occurring in almost epidemic proportions in Southern California. These crimes involve a telephone call or an email sent to a resident by someone claiming to be an "agent" or an "officer" from a government agency. Sometimes the caller claims to be from the Internal Revenue Service, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement or from a federal or local law enforcement agency.

The problem that is presented to our residents varies: you might owe outstanding taxes, have a problem with your immigration status or have a relative (often a grandson or granddaughter) in jail who needs money for bail or medical costs.

If you are the owner of a small restaurant or bar you may even get a call from "Edison" claiming that you have an outstanding bill that needs to be paid immediately or your electricity will be turned off. Often the victim is threatened with arrest if the orders from the person claiming to be an agent or law enforcement officer are not immediately followed.

The variations of this scheme are endless, but one thing occurs every time that is indicative of a scam: the only way to resolve or solve your problem is to go to the nearest drug store or supermarket that sells money cards (usually Green Dot cards), buy several (maximum value can be as high as \$500 each) and call the "agent" back with the pin numbers. Once you provide the crook with the pin numbers, your money is gone for good and the crooks (who are likely in another state or country) are never apprehended. Remember, no U.S. government agency — local, state or federal — takes payments of any kind over the phone or via email using money cards.

The next theft that is impossible for deputies to stop, but entirely possible for our residents to prevent is theft from lockers at fitness centers. At least twice a month a locker is broken into

at one of the local LA Fitness locations and a purse or wallet containing credit cards, cash and personal information is stolen. Almost as many times each month a report of a purse "hidden" on a car's floorboard outside of one of these fitness centers or at one of our parks is also reported stolen. Never take wallets or purses with you when exercising at a fitness center or a park. Take only your driver's license and leave it under your car's floor mat. If you must take wallets or purses, lock them in the trunk before you leave home or work.

The last prevalent crime is the theft of third row seats from SUVs (two were stolen the last week of September). Crooks have this theft down to a science and are in and out of your SUV with the third row seat in seconds. These seats bring in big money on eBay when resold. A simple bicycle-type cable lock fits through the seat's support brackets and will prevent them from being easily and quickly removed. Check out the photo and information provided on our safety website, safercerritos.com, for more information. Remember, you don't have to be a victim of these crimes, and ***If You See Something, Say Something.***

Monthly Crime Summary: September 2014

The volume of Part I felony crime in Cerritos continues to vary considerably from month-to-month. In June the figure was 82, in July it was 56, in August it was 83 and in September it was 102. If there is some good news on the crime fighting front it is that violent felony crime remains quite low. The following is a summary of the reported crimes by category: five robberies were reported in September (three of them were misdemeanor shoplifting crimes that became felony robberies when the suspects fought with loss prevention officers to avoid apprehension); three aggravated assaults; 33 residential burglaries (there were only 10 reported in August); 10 commercial/other burglaries (four involved locker break-ins); 12 grand thefts; 20 vehicle burglaries; and 19 auto thefts.

Scammers Target Younger Residents

Seniors are frequently the target of scam artists, usually via the telephone and sometimes the Internet. That trend was upended somewhat in September when the two reported telephone scams targeted Cerritos residents in their early 20s and 30s. In the first case a woman received a telephone call from "Agent Brown" claiming to be from "Federal Crime Investigation." She was told she was under investigation for tax fraud and would be deported if she did not pay a significant fine. Fearing imminent arrest, the woman went to a nearby supermarket, purchased several thousand dollars worth of Green Dot cash cards, called the scammer back

and immediately lost her money. Remember, no government agency will demand you resolve a problem with cash cards. The second scam victim was a 30-year-old resident who answered an Internet ad seeking individuals interested in becoming "mystery shoppers." In this particular case the shoppers were to evaluate the money transfer/wire services provided by various businesses in the area. The resident was contacted via email and told he would be sent a check (almost \$3,000) that was to be deposited in his checking account. Once the check was deposited he was further instructed to go to various locations and, using his own checking account, wire the money back to the suspect, keeping a small portion as his profit. Everything went accord-

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MONTHLY CRIME SUMMARY: September 2014

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ing to plan until a few days later when his bank advised him that there was no such account at the bank that supposedly had issued the check. Some form of this scam has been around for a long time, and the lesson is always the same. Never spend these checks until your bank tells you the check has cleared. There may be some legitimate secret buyer programs out there, but beware of depositing a check you've received from someone you don't know into your personal checking account. It may be a scam and you will never see your money again.

Robberies

Of the five reported robberies in September, three involved shoplifters who were apprehended by loss prevention officers. At the TJ Maxx on South Street, a suspect claimed he had a gun when detained outside and he fled through the parking lot. At the Los Cerritos Center Apple store, a suspect placed several earphones in a bag and walked out. When the loss prevention officer caught up with him the suspect put up a fight and escaped to a waiting vehicle. The third shoplifting incident occurred at the Target on South Street. Again, the suspect put up a fight when stopped by loss prevention officers, but was subdued and turned over to responding Sheriff's deputies. The other two robberies were street robberies involving bodily force and a handgun. The first occurred near Gridley Road and South Street and involved a suspect who pushed a person off of his bicycle and fled with it. The other robbery occurred at Bloomfield Avenue and South Street. Two employees of a restaurant were in the rear alley taking a break when approached by a suspect with a gun who demanded their money. Both suspects are still outstanding.

Aggravated Assaults

A female was riding in a car with three male acquaintances when the car had a flat tire. They stopped on Carmenita Road near Droxford Street to fix the flat when an argument ensued and escalated into a fight during which one of the men struck the female victim with a tire iron. She was transported to a nearby hospital. The second assault involved two female teenagers who were

patients at College Hospital. During a dispute, one stabbed the other with a pencil, causing minor injuries. The final assault took place in the parking lot of a business. Two co-workers were arguing when one punched the other, resulting in head injuries.

Residential Burglaries

The decline in residential burglaries experienced in July (nine) and August (10) abruptly reversed course in September, with 33 home break-ins reported. Three of the burglaries occurred in June or July, but were just reported last month. Although there was no particular neighborhood targeted, 23 of the 33 burglaries occurred east of Norwalk Boulevard. Except for two front doors kicked in and two front windows entered, all of the points of entry were through rear or side yards. Fifteen burglaries occurred during daytime hours and others occurred early in the evening during overnight hours or at an unknown time. Eleven of the 33 burglaries occurred on weekends. Screens were removed from several unlocked rear windows, some windows were pried open and five rear sliders were either pried open or shattered. Three condominiums near Palo Verde and South Street were burglarized while being fumigated and jewelry, video games and a laptop computer were reported stolen. Master bedrooms were frequently targeted by thieves and often the entire home was ransacked, which was evidence of experienced burglars. Laptop and tablet computers were the primary items reported stolen, along with jewelry, a camera, cash and a pressure washer from a garage.

Commercial/Other Structure Burglaries

The 10 commercial burglaries reported reflects a decline of two from the 12 reported in August. A suspect shattered a window at a fitness center on 183rd Street and stole a laptop computer. A man entered a weight loss clinic on Del Amo Boulevard and asked to use the restroom. He went undetected into an office and stole a laptop computer. During overnight hours, the Sprint store on South Street lost seven cell phones when a suspect shattered a front window to gain entry. Four lockers at the LA Fitness on Alondra Boulevard were targeted by thieves in

September. Cell phones and wallets were the primary losses. Where to leave valuables when at a fitness center or park is debatable, but any time you can leave wallets and purses at home, it is wise to do so. Only take your driver's license and leave it under your car's floor mat.

Grand Thefts

Grand theft remained consistent in September with 12 reports received (two occurred in August, but were reported last month). Cerritos Lexus reported the loss of \$3,000 from a safe and the City of Cerritos reported the recovery of an aluminum bus bench (the location it was stolen from has not been determined). Twelve batteries were stolen from buses parked at Valley Christian High School (on two different occasions), a jeweler in the mall paid \$500 for what turned out to be a fake gold chain and a suspect grabbed 15 rolls of lottery scratchers from a service station on South Street and fled. Two residents reported the theft of laptop computers from their unlocked cars, and another the theft of jewelry from her bedroom dresser. Shoplifters also hit the Target on South Street on two occasions and stole miscellaneous items, including several pairs of expensive sunglasses.

Vehicle Burglaries

There were 20 vehicle burglaries reported in September compared to 21 reported the previous month. It is important to note that all but one vehicle burglary occurred in a commercial or public parking lot. There were only two reported vehicle burglaries at the mall, but six reported in the LA Fitness parking lot on Alondra Boulevard. SUV third row seats were targeted three times and nine wallets were stolen along with five purses and assorted items such as sunglasses, credit cards, cash and backpacks.

Vehicle Thefts

There were 19 vehicle thefts reported in September (two occurred in August), nine of which were 1990s Honda and Toyotas. Twelve thefts occurred in commercial parking lots, three in apartment or condo parking lots and four in residential areas. Nine of the 19 vehicles were recovered in cities as far away as San Diego and as nearby as Cerritos, Whittier, Norwalk and Long Beach.

(562) 916-1266
Cerritos Community Safety Division

(562) 860-0044
Cerritos Sheriff's Station

CERRITOS SHERIFF'S STATION
COMMUNITY SAFETY CENTER

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