

“Crookology 101:” Simple Strategies for Reducing Your Crime Risk, Part 2

As mentioned in last month’s newsletter, the City of Cerritos finished 2014 with crime in many categories at record lows. Overall, Part I index crimes reported annually to the FBI declined by nearly 16 percent. Perhaps even more encouraging is that violent crimes, especially the types found in many other cities in Los Angeles County, are rare occurrences in Cerritos.

It is important for residents to remember that the typical crimes committed everyday in Cerritos — thefts of personal property — are almost impossible for anyone except potential victims to prevent. Prevention is only possible if residents regularly practice what we like to call “safe living strategies” and take steps to “harden the target.”

One might think that advances in technology would improve the ability of police to identify and apprehend criminals. Unfortunately, most property crimes are never solved and most thieves are seldom caught. When determined thieves prey upon neighborhoods such as Cerritos with easily accessible property, only alert and informed residents who routinely practice simple strategies to lower their crime risk can stop them. To continue with last month’s theme, here are more prevention strategies based upon the trends and tendencies of thieves who have victimized Cerritos residents in the past.

- Consider hiding places in your home where

small electronics or other valuables are difficult for thieves in a hurry to find. Burglars usually ransack drawers and closets in most rooms, especially bedrooms, unless you have a monitored alarm. A place that can only be reached with a stool or ladder, maybe in the garage, might be a good hiding place.

- When going on vacation, be sure to stop your newspapers. Nothing shows that no one is home more than a few days of newspapers stacking up on a driveway. If possible, leave a car in your garage, lock valuables such as jewelry and laptop computers in the trunk and hide or take the key with you. Use an automatic timer for a light or two, and maybe a radio, inside your house.
- Secure side garage doors. Over the past few months, several residential burglars have entered homes by kicking open these doors. Many are hollow-core doors without good dead-bolt locks and are easy to force open.
- Always shop or walk at night with a friend. Purse snatchings and street robberies are very rare occurrences in Cerritos, and in the last 15 years have occurred maybe once when two people were walking together.
- When you buy a new television, cut the box up into small pieces that fit into your recycle trash container. Don’t advertise your expensive purchase to strangers driving through

your neighborhood.

- Be wary of people who approach you in business parking lots with a story about how they’ve found money and want to share it with you if you put up some “good faith” cash of your own. These are old fashioned “pigeon drop” scams and they do occasionally occur in Cerritos.
- With all of the current telephone scams (the “IRS” and “mystery shopper” scams being the most common at the present time), consider screening your calls. Only pick up the telephone when you recognize the number and let your voice mail answer if the number isn’t familiar to you. If it’s a legitimate call, a message will be left. If it’s a telemarketer or a scam artist, they will hang up.
- Educate your older relatives about their vulnerability to telephone scams. Inform relatives that before they ever respond to demands from “government agents” asking for payment or “relatives” needing financial assistance, that they first call at least one family member to check out the caller’s story. If a pre-paid money card is involved, you know it’s a scam.

Help make Cerritos a safer city. **When You See Something, Say Something**, by calling the Cerritos Sheriff’s Station at (562) 860-0044.

Monthly Crime Summary: January 2015

There were 77 Part I felony crimes reported to the Cerritos Sheriff’s Station in January, an increase of 10 compared to December. The good news is that robberies continue to occur infrequently, with five reported last month. There were also five reported felony assaults, four of which involved family members as victims and perpetrators. With the exception of residential burglaries, all other categories of Part I crimes declined in January. It should be noted that although there was a significant annual decline in residential burglaries City-wide in 2014 versus 2013, last month there was a 33 percent increase

in burglaries compared to January 2014.

Don’t Be a Pigeon

As frequently mentioned in this newsletter, Cerritos residents are regularly targeted with grandparent scams, IRS scams, Edison scams and more. Cerritos residents have been victimized by all sorts of scam artists in the past year and unfortunately these thieves are never arrested and the lost money is never recovered. Another scam that occurs a bit more infrequently, but is still worth mentioning, is the “pigeon drop” scam. Like many scams, this one involves an older victim who is approached in a public

area, usually a parking lot. Last month a female Cerritos resident encountered a woman outside of Walmart who claimed to have found more than \$100,000 in cash. She was soon joined by another female who pretended not to know the first woman, and both convinced the resident that she could share in the found money if she was willing to put up some of her own money to show she could be trusted. (Sometimes the ruse involves a lawyer who is requesting “good faith” money.) The scammers drove the resident to her bank where she withdrew a large sum of cash, and then drove her to another one of

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MONTHLY CRIME SUMMARY: January 2015

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her banks for more funds. Fortunately, an alert clerk at the second bank suspected something was amiss, questioned our resident and called the Cerritos Sheriff's Station. Two scam artists, both obviously experienced in this type of crime, were taken to jail. Scams can only be prevented by educating potential victims to be aware and on guard when contacted by scam artists, both on the telephone and in public places. Law enforcement cannot protect you from these types of crimes, so please share this story with family members.

Robberies

Two of the five robberies (one was an attempt only) that occurred last month were shoplifting crimes that became robberies when the suspects fought with loss prevention officers when apprehended. Both occurred at the Target on Bloomfield Avenue and involved a stolen watch in one case and two fitness monitors in the other.

A suspect entered a bank on South Street and presented a "demand note," but fled before obtaining any money. Another robbery occurred when a suspect with a handgun entered a clothing store at Los Cerritos Center, demanded cash from a clerk and fled on foot once he was handed the money. The final robbery occurred at another clothing store nearby on South Street and also involved a handgun. This robber obtained cash from two registers and ran from the store.

Aggravated Assaults

There were four aggravated assaults reported in January, the same number as in December. A woman's brother-in-law was arrested for threatening her with a knife during a family argument. A similar family argument involved a woman's brother striking her on the head with a handgun. At Los Cerritos Center a woman struck a store clerk several times during an argument over a returned item. In a one-of-a-kind case, a woman was arrested after a witness reported seeing her holding her toddler daughter partially out of a car window as the vehicle was traveling southbound on the 605 Freeway.

Residential Burglaries

As previously mentioned, there was a noticeable spike in residential burglaries in January with 20 cases (two were attempts) reported, compared to 15 in January 2014. Seven of the crimes involved suspects entering through garage doors, either side doors or the larger roll-up doors. In some cases the doors were left open. Lost property included a bicycle, computers and miscellaneous tools. Several burglars entered through kitchen windows, some of which were left unlocked. Three burglars shattered rear sliding doors to gain entry into homes. In most of the burglaries involving residences the burglars ransacked bedrooms and took money, jewelry, laptop computers and iPads. Two televisions were stolen from one residence and a safe was stolen from another. Community Safety officers conducted fingerprint investigations in most of the burglaries, but no arrests have been made at this time.

Commercial/Other Structure Burglaries

Ten commercial or other structure burglaries were reported in January, one less than the previous month. These crimes ranged from copper wire stolen from a warehouse on 166th Street to someone using a string and sticky tape in an attempt to retrieve money from a bank drop box during the first week of January. A nursery on Norwalk Boulevard had a window of an office trailer shattered, but nothing appeared to be stolen. Three businesses on Edwards Road had windows shattered, offices ransacked and in one case several iPads and laptop computers stolen. A storage room door was kicked in at Cerritos High School, but nothing was stolen. Tools were stolen from a fenced storage area at a business on Park Street.

Vehicle Burglaries

Vehicle burglaries are usually the most frequently committed felony in Cerritos, and last month was no exception with 25 such crimes reported. By comparison, there were 29 vehicle burglaries in January 2014 and 21 reported last December. As with most property crimes, rarely

is anyone arrested for burglarizing a vehicle. While the majority of vehicle burglaries (13) occurred in commercial parking lots, almost half (12) took place in residential areas, which is a bit of an anomaly. The Cerritos Towne Center experienced five of last month's vehicle burglaries and the Los Cerritos Center accounted for three. Only one vehicle burglary occurred at the Home Depot complex. Among the items stolen were four purses, third-row seats from GMC SUVs on two separate occasions, one laptop computer, a set of golf clubs and a dog from a car at the Cerritos Towne Center. In a majority of the cases windows were shattered, although some suspects simply reached through partially open windows and used bodily force to push the windows down.

Grand Thefts

There were 14 grand thefts reported in January, a decrease of two compared to December. All but two grand thefts were committed at businesses. The two grand thefts that occurred in residential areas were reported by a woman claiming that a guest stole an expensive watch during a housewarming party, and another resident who reported the loss of tools from an unlocked truck camper parked in his driveway. Three grand thefts occurred at Los Cerritos Center and losses included cosmetics, clothing and five watches stolen from Nordstrom. Verizon and AT&T stores were targeted on four occasions where suspects snatched displayed cell phones and iPads and fled. Shoplifters took handbags from T. J. Maxx and a variety of small items from the Target on Bloomfield Avenue.

Grand Thefts Auto

Ten vehicles were reported stolen last month, a decrease from 13 stolen in December. Eight of the 10 thefts occurred in commercial parking lots and involved an older model Honda and a Chevy SUV taken at Los Cerritos Center, and another older model Honda stolen at the Cerritos Towne Center. Five of the stolen vehicles were Japanese products from the 1990s. A 2005 Mercedes E-320 was stolen on Shenandoah Avenue and a 2001 Mercedes SLK was taken on Running Creek Lane. Four of the vehicles have been recovered.

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Cerritos Community Safety Division

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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.