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Serious crime rates down

Newport Beach police say public drunkenness is also down. Their next focus is mortgage and loan fraud.

By Joseph Serna

In almost all serious categories, crime was down in Newport Beach in 2009 compared with 2008.

From public drunkenness and driving under the influence to robberies and assaults, police saw decreases in many frequent crimes last year.

According to Police Department statistics, there was a 28% decrease in public drunkenness in 2009. Police recorded 730 incidents in Newport Beach last year, compared with 1,009 incidents in 2008.

Last year's total was the lowest amount of drunkenness incidents tallied since 2006, according department statistics.

In line with that trend, Newport Beach recorded 20%, or 137 fewer DUIs, in the city last year. Only 540 DUIs were recorded in 2009, according to police.

Newport Beach residents did, however, see an uptick in burglaries, garage burglaries in particular, and in stolen cars.

There were 519 residential, commercial and garage burglaries in 2009, compared with 470 in 2008.

Last year's total was still lower than in 2007.

There was a marked increase in garage burglaries, jumping 40% in 2009 to a total of 88 compared with 63 just a year earlier.

"It is hard to determine why burglaries have gone up, especially garage burglaries," said Sgt. Evan Sailor. "Typically, the biggest obstacles facing the community is that many residents fail to secure their valuables, lock their homes or cars, and avoid becoming victims. It could also be related to the struggling economy and increased unemployment."

There were nearly the same number of thefts in 2009 — 1,626 — as there were a year earlier.

Police saw only a 2% decrease in those incidents.

In robberies and assaults though, police saw 25% and 11% decreases, respectively. There were 33 robberies in 2009, the lowest number since 2006.

A similar trend was found in assaults, which have been decreasing the last three years from a recent high of 609 in 2007. Last year, there were 530 assaults in Newport Beach.

Police are making headway in many areas, Sailor said, and are working to deal with the next growing crime trend: mortgage and loan fraud.

He said with the housing market and troubled economy, cases involving these types of fraud are on the rise.

The latest crime numbers are available at nbpd.org under the tab “Crime Information” and then going to “Crime statistics by year.”

Costa Mesa Police Department officials said they expect to have 2009 crime totals by next week.