

Violent crime up in county

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SANTA CRUZ — Violent crime in Santa Cruz County increased from 1992 to 1993 while it declined statewide, according to the state Attorney General's Office.

According to figures released Friday, reported violent crime — including robberies and aggravated assaults — grew by 6.1 percent in Santa Cruz County in the 1-year period.

Statewide, violent crime dropped more than 4 percent, the state Department of Justice reported. Property crime in the state and county dropped during the same period.

Capitola Police Chief Don Braunton said he suspects Santa Cruz County is experiencing what happened statewide over the past several years because of gangs.

"I don't think Santa Cruz County has had the kind of gang violence that other parts of the state have had until recently," he said.

Also, he said, "random violence is probably catching up to us," Braunton said.

In 1993, there were three more homicides, 67 more robberies, and 82 more aggravated assaults reported in the county.

Santa Cruz County's largest jump was in robberies, which grew by a 25 percent in 1993.

Rape reports dropped more than one-third from 1992 to 1993 with 57 reports, and aggravated assault and homicide reports increased slightly in the county, according to the Department of Justice.

Statewide, homicides were up by 3.2 percent. All other violent crimes — robbery, aggravated assault and rape — fell.

Watsonville police chief Terry Medina said his city had double the reported robberies in 1993 than it had in 1992.

"I thought we were very high until I talked to Salinas," Medina said. That city had a 130 percent increase, Medina said.

"I would say that's the trend in the surrounding area here," he said.

And despite the pervasiveness of gangs, Medina said gang violence was responsible for only 20 percent of the aggravated assaults in his city. Domestic violence is responsible for a large number of the assault reports, he said.

Medina said the violence that is reported seems worse because guns and knives are becoming more common in arguments.

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