

CRIME REPORT



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

Santa Cruz police investigators remove the body of a transient who was slain along the San Lorenzo Valley River in February 2002.

Crime down in sheriff territory

By CATHY REDFERN

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Crime was down 3 percent in unincorporated county areas last year, according to a federal index that tracks eight major crimes.

"To me it indicates how well we're doing," Sheriff Mark Tracy said. "But there are so many crimes not reflected in the index, from ID theft to graffiti to drug-related crime, all of which has a huge impact on neighborhoods."

Robberies and burglaries were up in the county last year, while homicides and rapes decreased compared to 2001.

Generally, county crime dropped for a number of years in the '90s but has leveled off, Tracy said.

"The tough part is we are facing potential (budget) cuts at a particularly hard time," he said. "But people have a base expectation of safety and I am constantly reminding area governments of

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that."

Tracy said he competes for county funding with a number of "worthy and highly motivated special interest groups."

And though deputies are fighting more gang-related crime in several South County areas, the department lost a gang investigator to budget cuts two years ago.

"There is no magic line at the border of Watsonville and Santa Cruz," he said. "Gang crime has a negative effect on everybody and we are continually addressing

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	2001	2002
HOMICIDE	10	2
RAPE	41	28
ROBBERY	31	38
ASSAULT	966	928
BURGLARY	571	636
LARCENY	1,705	1,589
AUTO THEFT	12	11
ARSON	30	30

Source: Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office

gang issues."

The Sheriff's Office has begun working more closely with the District Attorney's office and other police departments to prevent gang activity, he said.

Other challenges come from higher standards of proof in court, he said.

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"I guess the hardest thing to explain is how much time each case takes," he said. "Each one represents a victim and maybe a lengthy investigation and a potential prosecution."

"The days of an officer testifying alone are over. In the old days, he said it and that was it."

Crimes such as domestic violence and child abuse are top priorities but are also difficult to prove, he said.

"Those are the kinds of things stats don't show," he said. "We will not let up on keeping our community safe."

"We're lucky Santa Cruz is still a very nice place to live, but I suspect most people come here because they expect it to stay that way."

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