

Crime & Criminals - 2nd STATE REPORT

Violent crime up, property crime down

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SANTA CRUZ — Violent crimes such as robberies and homicides increased more than 8 percent in Santa Cruz County in 2010 compared with 2009, according to a new state study.

Crime statistics released by the state Attorney General's Office in the past week show that reported violent crimes rose in the county but property crimes like burglaries and car thefts dropped more than 9 percent.

More than 17,000 law enforcement agencies in the nation compile such uniform crime statistics for the FBI each year, and Santa Cruz police spokesman Zach Friend and others have said they are useful as a snapshot of crime.

The state report noted that Santa Cruz County's population grew from 270,882 in 2009 to 272,092 in 2010.

The number of reported homicides in the county jumped from 10 to 14 in large part because six of the homicides happened in Santa Cruz in 2010, Friend said. Similarly, nearly half the rapes and robberies in the county were reported in the city of Santa Cruz in 2010, he said.

BY THE NUMBERS

REPORTED SANTA CRUZ COUNTY CRIME TOTALS

| CRIME | 2009 | 2010 | % change |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|----------|
| Violent crimes | 1,215 | 1,313 | 8.1 |
| Homicide | 10 | 14 | 40 |
| Forcible Rape | 79 | 68 | -13.9 |
| Robbery | 222 | 269 | 21.2 |
| Aggravated Assault | 904 | 962 | 6.4 |
| Property crimes | 4,805 | 4,380 | -8.8 |
| Burglary | 1,732 | 1,737 | 0.3 |
| Vehicle theft | 847 | 656 | -22.6 |
| Theft more than \$400 | 2,226 | 1,987 | -10.7 |
| Theft less than \$400 | 4,254 | 3,887 | -8.6 |

For a breakdown of statistics for each county in the state, visit www.oag.ca.gov or http://ag.ca.gov/cms_attachments/press/pdfs/n2561_county_numbers.pdf

SOURCE: State Attorney General's Office

Watsonville Lt. David McCartney and others have said it is difficult to explain why crime surges or wanes. Gang activity, the economy and crime cycles play into the picture.

Santa Cruz police statistics for the first eight months of 2011 show a reduction in crime compared with the same period in 2010.

"It's totally flipped," Friend

said. "It's a marked decline in violent crime."

In a post on the Santa Cruz police blog — <http://santacruzpolice.blogspot.com> — Tuesday, Friend wrote that reported rapes in the city were down 16 percent, aggravated assaults were down 7 percent and robberies were down 3 percent.

There were 68 rapes in the county in 2010, a nearly 14 per-

cent decline from 2009, according to the report.

There were six homicides in Santa Cruz in 2010 and there have been two in Santa Cruz in 2011. Heather Stearns, 30, was found dead in an East Cliff Drive apartment on April 26 and Ana Luz Barajas, 48, was struck and killed by a wrong-way driver on the Ocean Street offramp of Highway 17 in July. Police believe the driver Eric Weers intentionally hit Barajas. He has pleaded not guilty and awaits a preliminary hearing.

More recent statistics about violent crime and property crime in Watsonville were not available Wednesday.

Watsonville Police Chief Manny Solano and Santa Cruz County Sheriff Phil Wowak said they had not yet reviewed the state statistics for 2009 and 2010 and declined to comment on them this week.

In California, reported violent crime dropped for the fourth year in a row, according to a statement from the State Attorney General's Office.

Violent crime per capita fell 6.9 percent from 2009 to 2010 — reaching its lowest level since 1968, state officials said.