

	2004	2005	% chg.
Homicide	0	1	—
Rape	6	6	0.0
Robbery	19	10	-47.4
Assault	140	124	-11.4
Burglary	137	187	36.5
Auto theft	42	42	0.0
Totals	344	370	7.6

HERMOSA BEACH

Crime went up in Hermosa Beach 7.6 percent, primarily because of burglaries. All of the city's other crime numbers were down in 2005.

The rise in burglaries was attributed to street gang members from Los Angeles committing a series of break-ins in Hermosa Beach, Torrance and Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach police Sgt. Paul Wolcott said.

In the crimes, lookouts used cellular telephones to communicate as their fellow thieves ransacked homes. Torrance police arrested five suspects in the crimes, helping to alleviate the problem in Hermosa Beach, Wolcott said.

In other crime activity, the city's one homicide at a Pacific Coast Highway construction site involved a love triangle. A suspect remains at large.

The big story in the city continued to surround the downtown plaza area, its sometimes rowdy customers and lawsuits against police officers.

Although it wasn't clear why, arrests dropped from 1,394 in 2004 to 1,038 in 2005. Police Chief Michael Lavin, who retired Feb. 9, said officers tried a new tactic when dealing with crowds at bars at Pier Plaza, making fewer arrests while trying to be more diplomatic in defusing problems before they got out of hand.

But, Lavin speculated, officers also might be wary of being too aggressive following a series of lawsuits alleging excessive force.

"People get a little gun-shy," Lavin said.

Officers, however, received fewer complaints in 2005. Lavin said he has consistently assigned many of the same police officers to work the downtown area and they developed more successful techniques in dealing with the crowds.

"I still think the biggest problem continues to be the plaza after hours," Lavin said. "After 10 o'clock to 2 (a.m.), that requires a lot of our attention. You have a certain number of people down there getting into brawls and all the associated criminal activity that occurs with people getting drunk."

Those crimes include noise, vandalism and public urination.

In addition, two women were attacked as they walked home from bars.

Three officers also were injured and are off duty, possibly from incidents in the downtown area.

"That plaza really has taken its toll on us, unfortunately," he said.

SOURCE: DAILY BREEZE
3/19/06