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New data analysis may target hot spots for Collier deputies to be visible - POLL

By JACOB CARPENTER

Monday, September 5, 2011

NAPLES — Ever since thieves ransacked two company vehicles this summer, swiping about $13,000 in equipment, crime prevention has become a priority at Jones Air Conditioning and Electric.

The East Naples company's staff soon might be getting more help from the Collier County Sheriff's Office and a new computer program spreading across the nation.

Sheriff's officials are working to install the Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety, or DDACTS, program, a federally sponsored system that overlays crime and traffic mapping data to show hot spots.

The program, which is expected to start later this month, already has identified three areas where increased police visibility could be used, including the East Naples Industrial Park home to Jones Air Conditioning and Electric.

"For them to implement something like this would be great," said Jose Ochoa, marketing director for the air conditioning business. "The economy is horrible and crime rates are going up, so it would be a big help."

The theory behind DDACTS is simple: Areas with high crime rates also tend to have high traffic crash rates. Map out where those areas are, then put more deputies in them during targeted times. The increased visibility deters crime and leads to more efficient traffic stops of reckless, drunken or criminal drivers.

"With the right interpretations, it gives us the ability to focus and say, 'Here's the area where we need to be at a given time of the day or week,' rather than just scattering resources throughout the county," Collier County Sheriff Kevin Rambosk said.

The execution of DDACTS can be complicated. Sheriff's officials have been working for about a year to compile and interpret the data. Some fender-benders and minor traffic crashes can be factored out, and mapping analysts look at crime trends to identify areas with high or rising rates. Three years of crime and traffic data were used for most of the initial mapping.

Collier sheriff's Chief Jim Bloom said three early target spots have been found: the East Naples Industrial Park, areas near Immokalee and Vanderbilt roads east of I-75, and the Airport-Pulling and Pine Ridge road corridor, which was most noticeable.

"We knew we had some burglaries, both vehicular and structure in that area, but when you start putting the crashes over the top of that, it stands out like a neon sign," Bloom said. "We had no idea we had so many accidents in there. It was good that it was brought to our attention and we can hopefully lower our crash rate and combat crime at the same time."

A national approach

About 200 agencies nationally have a DDACTS system or are installing one. The agencies have varied in size, ranging from Lafourche Parish, La., one of the first to use DDACTS, with about 100,000 residents, to large areas such as Baltimore and Nashville, Tenn.

Federal officials believe DDACTS can work in any area, and Lafourche Parish sheriff's officials have been pleased with the results.

Most notably, data drove the parish's deputies to target drunken driving enforcement from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m., rather than later at night. Drunken driving arrests more than doubled, and traffic fatalities in the parish dropped from 30 in 2008 to 21 or fewer each year since.

"It's the best use of resources," Lafourche Parish sheriff's Capt. J.P. DeGravelles said. "You're not reacting to what you think something may be. We're actually reacting to what the facts are."

While researchers believe in the connection between crime and traffic crash rates, the reasoning is often debated.

"Law enforcement has long been aware that where a concentration of crime exists crashes often tend to concentrate as well. To date, no research adequately explains this phenomenon," Ronald E. Wilson, a mapping and analysis manager for the National Institute of Justice, wrote last year in the journal Geography and Public Safety.

Rambosk said he didn't fully agree with that, though he added no data supports his contention.

"I've seen a part of that report, and again, with crime and traffic safety, what we're hoping to find out is if there is a correlation between the two and does this help us to reduce activities in these areas," Rambosk said. "If it does, we'll be able to show it."

Deputies in motion

Rambosk said deputies could start targeted enforcement in mid-September.

No overtime will be needed and the startup costs for starting DDACTS were less than $1,000, not counting time spent by staff already in place.

Deputies won't be reassigned to different areas, but rather will make themselves more visible in hot spots. That could mean more traffic stops, more time spent checking in with local business owners, or deputies doing paperwork in high traffic areas. Deputy discretion will be emphasized.

"We're not looking at totally readjusting or pulling people out of areas," Bloom said. "This is just asking the general agency: when you're going somewhere or you have some down time, concentrate on these areas."

Other agencies with DDACTS haven't seen criminals moving from hot spots to other areas with less patrol, and Bloom said it isn't expected here.

"You can always push crime. There's no bones around it," Bloom said. "If we see another spike in another area, maybe we've pushed it to one from another and we'll have to readjust."

Collier County officials have committed to the program for at least six months, though results haven't always been immediate for other agencies.

In Lafourche Parish, crime fell 0.7 percent more in DDACTS enforcement areas during the first six months compared to non-enforcement areas. In that time, crashes fell 12.8 percent in hot spots but dropped 14 percent in non-hot spots.

Still, most agencies have seen positive results from DDACTS and stuck with it.

"In six months, if we find out it's not making any difference, then we'll look at alternative ways to keep moving forward," Rambosk said. "If it does work, we'll look at how we broaden it."

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Collier Crime Up Slightly In 2011

CCSO_Star, a member of the Naples community. This story is neither endorsed by nor affiliated with this site.

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The year-end Collier County crime numbers show a 4.8 percent increase over 2010. While this is down slightly from the 2011 mid-year report of a 5.9 percent increase, Sheriff Kevin Rambosk is encouraging more proactive anti-crime efforts and stimulating more community involvement to grow partnerships to maintain a safe Collier County.

There were 6,206 Part 1 crimes reported in 2011. That number is up by 282, or 4.8 percent, from the 5,924 crimes reported in 2010. The statistics represent the categories of homicide, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft.

The numbers, which the Collier County Sheriff's Office has submitted to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, represent crimes in unincorporated Collier County and Everglades City.

Since the release of the mid-year numbers, CCSO has launched a new proactive crime-fighting initiative called Data-Driven Approach to Crime and Traffic Safety, or DDACTS. DDACTS integrates location-based crime and traffic crash data to determine the most effective methods for deploying resources. The agency has also increased awareness efforts to help members of the community understand the critical role they play in keeping Collier County safe.

Sheriff Rambosk said the community's focus on securing or removing valuables from their automobiles has significantly reduced the opportunity for crime and that is reflected in the 11.1 percent decrease in larcenies from motor vehicles in 2011.

Those measures include locking doors and windows and activating alarm systems if they are available and joining or forming a Neighborhood Watch group or Community Safety Team.

Sheriff Rambosk said factors such as increased prescription drug abuse, the ongoing negative economy and crimes of opportunity affected the 2011 crime numbers. The community also followed the national crime trend of increased thefts of lawn equipment, catalytic converters and copper.

The increase in burglaries can be attributed in part to the fact that long-vacant homes are now seeing new owners.

The overall number of violent crimes in unincorporated Collier County and Everglades City decreased by 2.1 percent in 2011 when compared to 2010.

Homicides dropped by the greatest percentage, showing a 10 percent reduction from 10 in 2010 to nine in 2011. Aggravated assaults decreased from 662 to 628, for a 5.1 percent drop. Two categories of violent crimes went up. Sexual assaults increased from 110 in 2010 to 111 in 2011, and robberies went up from 195 to 208.

Here are some of the ways citizens can help deputies drive crime down:

* Lock your car and keep valuables out of view

* Call 239.252.0700 to schedule a home or business security survey by a CCSO Crime Prevention specialist

* Report unusual activity to law enforcement

* Start or join a Neighborhood Watch program

* Mentor a child

* Be alert and aware of your surroundings

* Join one of CCSO's Community Safety Teams to help address code enforcement and other problems at the neighborhood level

* Protect personal information like your Social Security number, computer passwords and banking information.

* When online, don't chat with strangers or respond to their e-mails

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Jump in burglaries partly responsible for crime increase in Collier

By AISLING SWIFT

Friday, February 10, 2012

Burglaries in unincorporated Collier County and Everglades City jumped by 26 percent from 2010 through 2011, an increase partly attributed foreclosures.

The jump is part of an overall 4.8 percent increase in reported "Part 1 crimes" — from 5,924 in 2010 to 6,206 in 2011. Part 1 crimes are homicide, sexual assault, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny, and motor vehicle theft.

The reported burglaries increased from 1,090 to 1,373, according to the report, which law enforcement agencies statewide submit to the Florida Department of Law Enforcement.

"We as a community have been dealing with the ramifications of vacant homes for several years now," Collier County Sheriff Kevin Rambosk said. "As these homes are now beginning to change hands, people are discovering that at some point in time a burglary has occurred."

Increased prescription drug abuse, the ongoing negative economy and crimes of opportunity affected last year's numbers, said Rambosk, who noted that the community mirrored a national crime trend of increased thefts of lawn equipment, catalytic converters and copper.

Car thieves also were busier, stealing 194 vehicles, compared with 182 the year before, and larcenies (thefts) inched up from 3,675 to 3,683. However, there was an 11.1 percent decrease in larcenies from motor vehicles, which Rambosk attributed to urging residents to hide or remove valuables visible to thieves.

He urged residents to use those same crime prevention measures to reduce burglaries by locking doors and windows, activating alarm systems — if available — and joining or forming a neighborhood watch group or Community Safety Team.

"No increase in crime is acceptable to me or to our community," Rambosk said, listing the elements at the root of crime — ability, desire and opportunity. "We can't control ability and desire, but we can control opportunity."

The overall number of violent crimes decreased 2.1 percent last year, with homicides dropping from 10 to nine, and aggravated assaults decreasing from 662 to 628, a 5.1

percent drop. But two violent crime categories increased: Robberies grew from 195 to 208, and sexual assaults inched up from 110 to 111.

The numbers don't include the city of Naples, which earlier this week reported a 2.3 percent increase in crime within its jurisdiction in 2011.

Since the release of last year's midyear numbers, the Sheriff's Office launched a new proactive crime-fighting initiative called Data-Driven Approach to Crime and Traffic Safety (DDACTS), which integrates crimes based on locations and traffic crash data to determine how to use resources in the most effective way.

The agency also increased awareness efforts to help the community understand the critical role they play in keeping the county safe. Here are some ways citizens can help:

Lock your car and keep valuables out of view.

Call 239-252-0700 to schedule a home or business security survey with a Sheriff's Office crime prevention specialist.

Report unusual activity.

Start or join a neighborhood watch program.

Mentor a child.

Be alert and aware of your surroundings.

Join one of the Sheriff's Office Community Safety Teams to help address code enforcement problems and other neighborhood issues.

Protect personal information, including your Social Security number, computer passwords and banking information.

When online, don't chat with strangers or respond to their emails.

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Safety Campaign Highlights Dangers Of Distracted Driving

CCSO_Star, a member of the Naples community. This story is neither endorsed by nor affiliated with this site.

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Throughout April, the Collier County Sheriff's Office will join law enforcement agencies around the country in urging motorists to consider the lives of others on the road and to stop using cell phones while driving.

April Is National Distracted Driving Prevention Month.

In addition to cell phone use, the safety campaign seeks to discourage other distracted and careless driving behaviors such as grooming, eating or looking for an address while driving.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has identified texting and cellular telephone use as the fastest growing and most visible distraction as an associated factor in collisions. In 2009, nearly 5,500 people were killed and 450,000 more were injured in distracted driving crashes in the U.S., according to the NHTSA.

The age group with the greatest proportion of distracted drivers was the under-20 age group – 16 percent of all drivers younger than 20 involved in fatal crashes in the U.S. were reported to have been distracted while driving. Of those drivers involved in fatal crashes who were reportedly distracted, the 30- to 39-year-olds had the highest proportion of cell phone involvement, according to the NHTSA.

CCSO recognizes the importance of raising public awareness about the risks of distracted driving. In December 2011, Sheriff Kevin Rambosk and AAA-sponsored professional race car driver Michael Cenzi, along with AAA and The Auto Club South Traffic Safety Foundation, teamed up to launch "Stay Focused: Don't Text and Drive." The CCSO safety campaign seeks to bring awareness, education and the pursuit of legislation for a ban on texting while driving in Florida.

CCSO is using the April safety campaign to highlight the agency's efforts to educate motorists and enforce traffic laws along Pine Ridge Road with the goal of significantly reducing injury crashes and eliminating fatal crashes caused by careless driving.

Last year proved to be a deadly one on Collier County's roadways. In particular, Pine Ridge Road stood out as a dangerous thoroughfare.

In 2011, the Collier County Sheriff's office investigated 28 injury-producing vehicle crashes on Pine Ridge Road between Interstate 75 and Goodlette-Frank Road. In addition, six people died in vehicle crashes on the same stretch of roadway last year.

In the hope of combating even more fatalities, during October 2011, proactive measures were immediately put into action through Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety (DDACTS). This operational model integrates location-based crime and traffic data to establish effective and efficient methods for deploying law enforcement and other resources. The goal of implementing DDACTS is to reduce crime, crashes and traffic violations across the country. By using geomapping the Pine Ridge Road corridor was specifically identified.

The increased law enforcement is expected to improve traffic flow by reducing or eliminating crashes which inevitably cause costly traffic delays.

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Reported crimes down 6 percent in Collier

By JESSICA LIPSCOMB

Monday, July 9, 2012

During the first half of the year, reported crimes decreased by about 6 percent in Collier County compared with the same period last year, the Sheriff's Office announced Monday.

The number of reported homicides, sexual assaults, robberies, aggravated assaults and larcenies dropped, while burglaries and motor vehicle thefts increased. In those seven categories, 2,888 crimes were reported during the first six months of this year, compared with 3,072 last year.

Sheriff Kevin Rambosk attributed the decline in crime to better community policing and the implementation of Data-Driven Approaches to Crime and Traffic Safety (DDACTS), which uses mapping to pinpoint areas prone to crime and crashes.

The increase in motor vehicle thefts and burglaries likely has roots in the drug trade, Rambosk said.

"When they can't get the drugs anymore to resell, they look for alternative ways to make money," he said. "Traditionally, there's a strong link between drugs and crime."

Rambosk said he is looking to increase the number of community safety teams, a neighborhood-watch type program that works with law enforcement.

"Still the most effective and successful method of preventing crime is someone seeing something, getting the information and letting us get in there and deal with it," Rambosk said.