

Interviews with NPO Capers By Lowell Hyatt

This article is based on Officer Capers' response to my question, "Should minor crime incidents, such as items stolen from vehicles and open garage doors, be reported to the police even though the values of those items are small and/or the chances of the items being recovered are small?" His answer to the question was, "Yes." His explanations for his answer follow.

"Many people do not bother reporting minor crimes because they do not think those crimes will be solved. What they do not realize is that information in the reports serves several purposes. First, it gives me and other detectives a more accurate idea of what is going on in a particular area. Part of my job is to monitor all reports in my areas and then commit part of my work week to the problem areas and try to solve the issues. If I do not know there are a bunch of car burglaries in an area, for example, I do not know to be looking for some suspects. Catching a suspect frequently enables me to solve other, larger crimes in an area. It might also confirm my suspicions that someone in a problem house I am watching in that area is actively committing crimes.

"Another reason for reporting minor crimes is that we frequently recover bicycles, car stereos, jewelry, game systems, TVs, and a pile of other property from an arrest or search of a suspect's house. We then compare the found property to reported incidents in the area. Unfortunately, many of the items either were not reported stolen, or we do not have adequate identification. We are then forced to just log the items into the police property room where they remain for several months until a city auction occurs. It is very frustrating when I seize a bunch of stolen property from a suspect with the hope that I can file multi cases on him, only to fail to figure out where the property came from.

"There is a website for reporting minor crimes. At the bottom of the Garland Police website, you can click on the "CopLogic" section. That click will take you to the page that explains what reports can be made online and what information is needed. Using the website to report minor crimes will usually be much faster than reporting the incident by telephone.

"Reporting minor crime incidents to the police helps me and my fellow police officers serve you."

November 2011

I asked Officer John Capers, our Neighborhood Police Officer (NPO), to provide guidelines the readers of this newsletter should use in deciding whether to call 911 or the non-emergency number (972-485-4840). He provided the following comments and guidelines.

"The guidelines for calling 911 are (1) a crime or accident is currently happening or just happened, (2) someone's safety/property is in immediate danger, and (3) the caller believes a police officer is needed to physically be present to help in one or both of the preceding situations. Examples of 911 situations are car accidents that result in one or more vehicles being inoperable or an injury to a person, or any kind of theft/burglary/assault/criminal mischief in progress where there is a possibility police could arrive in time to catch and arrest the suspect.

"The guidelines for the non-emergency number are the citizen needs to make a report, has a question or possibly needs to have a police officer come out, but the lack of an immediate response by a police officer will not endanger either the citizen or the citizen's property and will not be a factor in determining whether or not the suspect is apprehended. Examples of incidents that are appropriate for the non-emergency number are questions about obtaining protective orders, where to pay traffic tickets, or making delayed reports of property crimes, such as stolen vehicles, vehicle burglaries or criminal mischief.

"The dispatcher receiving the call from the citizen will make the judgment decision to either transfer the caller to a 'call taker' or front desk person to make a report over the phone or dispatch an officer to make the report due to the nature, gravity or potential for crime scene evidence/photos, such as home/building burglaries, delayed sexual or family assaults, etc.

"A third option for reporting crime incidents is the website established for reporting minor crimes. As was noted in last month's CNA newsletter, at the bottom of the Garland Police website, you can click on the 'CopLogic' section. That click will take you to the page which explains what reports can be made online and what information is needed."

Officer Capers pointed out that anyone contacting him needs to understand that he, as is true of all NPOs, works a five-day, 40-hour schedule. That schedule means there is a high probability he will not be available to take telephone calls. Thus, days may elapse prior to his being able to respond to calls and e-mails. Officer Capers' new phone number is 972-485-4883. He can also be reached at capersj@garlandtx.gov.

December 2011

As the readers of this newsletter know, a significant number of car burglaries have occurred in Camelot. I asked Officer John Capers (the Neighborhood Police Officer who serves Camelot) some questions concerning car burglaries. The questions and answers are listed below. Officer Capers' answers are based on his observations.

LRH - Is the location of the vehicle (parked in street or driveway at back of house) a factor in whether or not a vehicle will be burglarized?

Officer Capers - I would say more burglaries occur when they are parked in the back driveways. Primary reasons are that the criminal has a better chance of concealment with dark alleys, and high wooden fences block neighbors' views. They still occur on the street or in front driveways, but not as often.

LRH - What is the time period in which most incidents occur?

Officer Capers - I don't have an exact time, but suffice it to say "overnight." That is when most people are home and, thus, their cars are home. The concealment of darkness and the majority of people being asleep during the night mean less chance of car burglaries being seen and thus called in

LRH - Is the visibility of attractive items a factor in determining which vehicles will be subjected to incidents?

Officer Capers - Yes. We preach to people all the time to please conceal their valuables or take them inside with them at night. You have to ask yourself, "Why was my car chosen over the fifty other cars on my street or in the parking lot?" We call it "hardening the target" when we tell people to take control and make their cars less appealing than someone else's car. But people tend to get lazy and distracted with daily life and don't bother to remove their GPSs from their dashboards. They also leave their iPods, purses, laptops, wallets and guns in their cars overnight, which makes their vehicles much more inviting for the criminal.

LRH - Do you have additional comments/suggestions for reducing the possibility of a vehicle being burglarized?

Officer Capers - Lock your vehicle. Some people are of the mindset that the criminal is going to break in anyway so they might as well leave it unlocked so they don't have to pay for a broken window on top of the property loss. I have found the majority (not all) of the people I have arrested for car burglaries don't break the windows or pry the doors. They simply walk down the street, checking door handles, and get into the unlocked ones.

LRH - Should the victim expect a police officer to come to the crime scene?

Officer Capers - Some people just feel better about things when an officer comes to help them with making a report. They might feel like something more will get done if an officer comes or that it's just good "customer service." I ask that, if at all possible, they make a report online using CopLogic or over the phone to the non-emergency number. All three ways accomplish the same thing; that is, a report gets made. The responding officer is not going to be able to do any more than if the victim reported online or over the telephone. In fact, it only causes an officer to be unable to answer other emergency calls because he's sitting at the car burglary scene, doing a thirty to forty-five minute report. In addition, on typical car burglaries, our Forensics (crime scene) Unit does not come out to dust for fingerprints or take photos, DNA swabs, plaster molds and other things people expect from watching CSI on TV. What will happen, though, is that several people will see those reports made and do the following:

- Watch for trends in a certain area to catch a burglary ring of people (my job).
- Check local pawn shops/game store records to match missing property.
- Be able to locate owners of property when an arrest is made or search of a car/home conducted which turns up suspected stolen property.

January 2012

This month I asked Officer Capers about burglaries of homes that occur when the residents are not at home.

Which days of the week and times of the day do the majority of the burglaries occur? – Most burglaries occur between Monday and Friday, 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Obviously, that is when the majority of people are gone to work and school, and they come home in the evening to discover the burglary. The weekends are usually a little quieter. However, that is when people leave their garages open while they're doing yard work, etc., and that is when we get

open garage burglaries, which are in the same category as house burglaries (when the garage is attached to the house).

What often overlooked actions can be taken to reduce the possibility of a home being burglarized? – Nothing is foolproof, but there are steps people can take:

- Get to know your neighbors. They are usually the most effective when it comes to calling in suspicious persons/vehicles to the police (and it's free!).
- If you are home and someone knocks on the door, at least acknowledge them and tell them you're not interested. Many burglars knock and then go around back when no one answers. When they kick in the door or window, both they and the homeowner are surprised.
- Temporarily stop the mail and paper (or get a neighbor to get them) when you are out of town for extended periods. These and high weeds are telltale signs that no one has been home for awhile.
- Invest in an alarm system and, if possible, a video surveillance system. Alarms sometimes don't get the burglar caught, but they at least limit the few minutes they have to rummage through a house before police arrive. We've caught many a home burglar on home video systems. (Sometimes it's not the victim but the neighbor who caught the suspects on video.)
- Don't put empty boxes of your new flatscreen TV or computer out at the curb for trash pick-up.
- There are many more tips on the Internet if people just search "crime prevention tips."

Which are the most frequent means of entry used by burglars? – Typically, burglars make entry through a side or rear door or window. These spots are usually concealed by the back yard fence or shrubs/bushes.

What often overlooked actions can be taken to reduce the possibility of entry?

- Make sure your windows are locked after having people over for a party. Many times a guest will unlock a bedroom window and come back later through that window to burglarize their friend's house.
- Keep a lock on your back yard gate (not always feasible for those who use lawn services, etc.)
- Use manual clips on windows and door jamb devices on back doors to prevent entry.
- Have a large guard dog for a pet.
- Plant thorny, prickly bushes in front of windows.

Which types of items are most likely to be taken? – Jewelry. Cash. Guns. Electronics, such as TVs, video game systems, computers, digital cameras. From open garages: air compressors, golf clubs, tools, bicycles.

Which types of identification will maximize the possibility of police being able to return stolen items to the owner?

- A detailed description of the object, including any defects, scratches, or after-market work done which would differentiate that object from others like it.
- Serial numbers, serial numbers, serial numbers! Just this week in Camelot we recovered a digital camera stolen from an open garage because the homeowner gave us the serial number, and we located it in a pawn shop.
- If there's no serial number, then mark a unique number somewhere on the object that only you would know.