

## **TUCSON POLICE DEPARTMENT**

### **NOTE ON 2005 PROPERTY CRIME STATISTICS**

**BACKGROUND:** Property crimes include burglary, larceny, motor vehicle theft and arson. In Tucson, the overwhelming majority of property crimes are larcenies; for example, in 2004 there were over 34,000 larceny reports, compared to about 13,000 reports for burglary, motor vehicle theft and arson combined.

In 2003 and 2004, the City of Tucson was ranked number one and number two respectively in the nation for property crime rates in major cities. These rates were called into question by many people who believed that in reality other cities had much higher property crime rates. So in 2004, the Tucson Police Department began to study how it responded to property crimes. The study showed that the method of reporting some crimes, especially larcenies, was causing crime counts to be erroneously inflated. The study also found that several steps could be taken to decrease property crimes in Tucson. As a result of this study, the Tucson Police Department made various changes, which are described below.

These changes resulted in dramatic decreases from 2004 to 2005 in larceny counts (-43%) and burglary counts (-19%). Though auto theft and arson counts increased slightly, the total number of property crime reports dropped by a third in 2005. While the majority of the decrease in larcenies was due to reporting changes (see *Improvement in Lower-Level Crime Reporting* below), a 10% drop in larceny cases was realized after accounting for the new reporting methods. The burglary decrease represents a true drop in the number of cases.

#### **SUMMARY OF CHANGES:**

*Formation of Property Crimes Division:* A full TPD division was created specifically to address property crimes.

*Creation of Major Offenders Unit:* A typical felony pawner (a person pawns stolen items) commits several property crimes each day. In its first nine months, this unit arrested 138 felony pawners. This unit was also assigned to actively target top burglary offenders. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the top 10% of burglars in any city *each* commit over 230 burglaries every year.

*Fully Staffed Surveillance Squad:* During the first nine months that this unit was fully staffed, it helped remove several repeat offenders from the street.

*Electronic Pawn Reporting:* TPD began using electronic pawn reporting to eliminate a backlog of pawn records. Current pawn data helps investigators identify and track suspicious pawn activities and patterns.

*Improved Communication:* Communication was improved to eliminate duplication of efforts, such as multiple units searching for the same individuals.

*Proper Case Reporting:* Training was conducted to ensure that multiple offenses for the same incident were reported as a single case, as specified in FBI guidelines. For example, a stolen vehicle with stolen items inside is to be counted as one case with two offenses, not as two separate cases.

*Increased Staffing in the Investigative Services Bureau:* Four officers and three detectives were added to the units in this Bureau that deal with property crimes.

*Improvement in Lower-Level Crime Reporting:* Because TPD does not have the resources to physically respond to every low-level crime, it handles such crimes using a mail-in report. In the past, when a citizen called to report such a crime, TPD classified the call as a crime based on the citizen's verbal account of the incident, and mailed out a report for the citizen to fill out and mail back. Only 22% of the mail-in reports were returned to TPD. Some citizens did not return the form because they found the item they thought was stolen. The U.S. Postal Service returned many forms to TPD because the citizen gave an invalid address, leading to the belief that some reports were insurance frauds. One hundred percent of these calls counted toward the totals that were reported to the FBI, even though there was actual documentation of a crime for less than a quarter of them. In 2004, TPD contacted other large cities to ask how they handled these reports, and found that most cities require a citizen to make a report in person. TPD chose to keep the mail-in form to make reporting easy for the citizen, but now classifies these reports as "Miscellaneous Incidents" until the mail-in report is received from the citizen. The case is then reclassified based on the written report and is counted in its new classification for FBI statistics. This eliminates the chance that lost items and fraudulent reports are counted as crimes, and ensures that TPD reports only documented crimes to the FBI.