

Fresno police Chief Jerry Dyer notes spike in crime in wake of Prop. 47 passage

By Jim Guy

Fresno Chief Jerry Dyer speaks to officers before an anti-gang unit launches a sweep through the city in search of gang members who fired into a home, critically wounding a 16-year-old girl. THE FRESNO BEE

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The passage of Proposition 47 by California voters in November is at least partially to blame for an uptick in Fresno crime figures, Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer said this week.



Aggravated assault is up 9.9% in a 28-day period ending Wednesday, although it remains down 3.9% for the year in figures released by police after the department's monthly Crime View session, in which Dyer and his command staff go over key statistics. Burglary is up by 30.7%, in the period, while it remains down by 12.8% for the year. Auto theft spiked by 12.6% but is still down by 25.9% for the year.



Dyer spoke about the trend during the session, as well as later Wednesday afternoon to a tactical team which was organized to go after gang members connection to the shooting of a 16-year-old girl wounded in the head when shots were fired through a door in central Fresno.

He said the passage of Proposition 47, which reclassified some property and drug crimes from felonies to misdemeanors and went into effect immediately after voters approved it, was a "significant downfall for folks in California. We don't make laws, but this has made our job more difficult." He said the prison realignment, which shifted a number of inmates from prison to local jails, as well as early releases from Fresno County Jail have compounded the effects of the measure.

The chief indicated he was especially concerned about the effects of issuing citations to methamphetamine addicts instead of arresting them so that they might be diverted into drug treatment programs.

Sgt. Tim Tietjen of the department's Career Criminal Auto Theft Team said that before the passage of the proposition, the city was averaging about seven car thefts a day. Now, it is about 10 per day. Tietjen said the driving force behind auto theft is methamphetamine. Previously, a passenger in a stolen car, who is often also stealing cars, could often be found in possession of the drug and jailed for several days. Now, they are issued a citation and walk away.

Tietjen said simply having that person off the streets for a couple of days helped drive down the daily thefts. He added that he isn't sure if those issued citations are aware they are getting ticketed instead of arrested because of Proposition 47, but it seems clear that they know something has changed.

Gangs were also a key topic of the Crime View session. Police are in the midst of a crackdown on local gangs, an answer to 38 shootings (19 gang-related), 17 gunshot victims and four homicides in the past 28 days. Sgt. David Ramsey of the department's Street Violence Bureau said that inter-gang violence is taking place throughout the city, including strife between southeast Asian gangs and Hispanic gangs and infighting amongst rival black and Hispanic gangs.

Dyer took issue with nationwide attention on protests against police in cities nationwide, telling his officers:

“It’s unfortunate (that there is) a focus on police misconduct at a time when people are shooting one another. That’s where the focus should be.”

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