

## To curb northwest Fresno crime spree, police boost patrols

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Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer gathered about 75 of his officers on Wednesday to explain their new assignment: ending a violent period of gang violence currently ripping through northwest Fresno.

“Too many people in too many neighborhoods are living in fear,” Dyer said. “I’ve talked to these folks. Some told me they want to relocate or they’re afraid to let their kids play outside.”

Starting this week, the department will have between 50 and 75 additional uniformed and undercover officers combing the streets north of McKinley Avenue and west of Blackstone Avenue for gang members and other violent offenders. The operation has no ending date, but Dyer told officers to plan on focusing on northwest Fresno until “at least Christmas.”

The move comes after a wave of robberies, aggravated assaults, domestic violence and shooting cases in the area. Between Oct. 21 and Nov. 4, the violent crime rate rose 84 percent in northwest Fresno.

During that period, there were 20 shootings in all of Fresno – 14 of which were in the northwest. Although homicides are down, shootings in the city are up about 34 percent from where they were as of Nov. 4 last year.

Dyer attributed most of the increased violence to gangs crossing McKinley into northwest Fresno, which he believes is bringing violence into typically peaceful neighborhoods.

On Oct. 31, someone or a group of people [fired 45 shots](#) into a neighborhood near East Vassar and North Glenn avenues. One person was killed and another wounded during the volley, which police believe was gang-related.

Earlier that month, Willie Ford, 19, and Denzel Ford, 18, were killed on San Pablo Avenue near Barstow Avenue. The next day, two of their family members were shot while holding a vigil for the fallen brothers, who police say were gang members.

Dyer said the gang activity swirling around the Ford family was responsible for some of the uptick in gang violence, but not all of it.

He believes the criminal justice system has been weakened over the last year as a result of the passage of Proposition 47, which allowed some less violent offenders to get early release from custody. That, in turn, has emboldened criminals, Dyer has said.

“We know who these gang members and violent offenders are,” he said. “It’s time to take away their sense of anonymity.”

The new task force consists of officers from a variety of assignments, including violent crime suppression, vice and traffic units. The theory is that by stepping up everything – from traffic stops to undercover operations – more violent offenders will be taken off the streets for lesser crimes or previous warrants before they hurt someone, Dyer said.

The operation began on Nov. 2 and led to 18 felony arrests as of Wednesday afternoon.

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