

Cathie Rowand | The Journal Gazette

Fort Wayne police officer Mark Bieker, with his partner, Justice, plans to spend more time on foot as a crime deterrent.

As temps rise, so do crimes

City police get 30% more calls in warm months

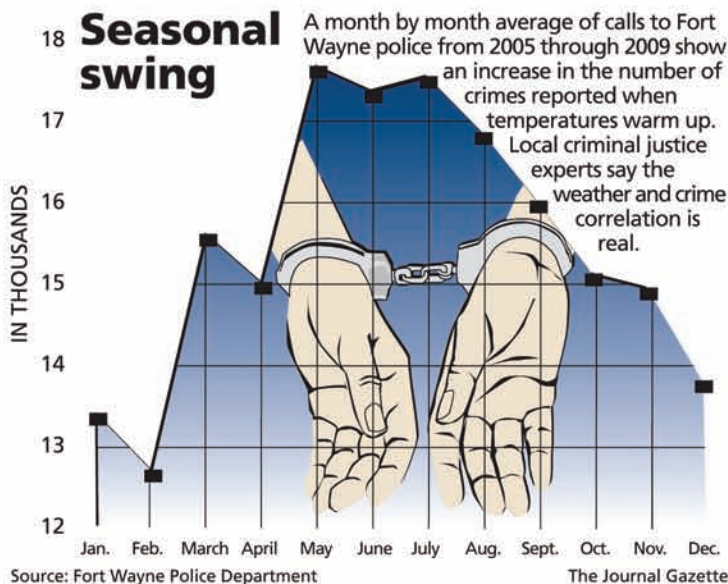
HOLLY ABRAMS
The Journal Gazette

A change in seasons is evident among local police. Many have begun wearing summer uniforms, bicycle patrols have started and more Fort Wayne officers will be seen patrolling on foot.

City police officer Mark Bieker enjoys taking to the streets and the Rivergreenway with his police dog, Justice, a Dutch shepherd. Foot patrol is one way to help deter crime, which according to local officials, is expected to mount in the coming weeks and months.

As summer nears, police will make themselves more visible, but so will criminals. When temperatures rise, the crime rate follows, according to criminal justice experts.

Fort Wayne police receive on average about 12,000 more calls for



service from May through July than from December through February, according to a Journal Gazette review of police data over the past five years. That's a 30 percent increase during those warmer months.

That increase can be attributed to

more human interaction, heat that causes tensions to rise and additional opportunities for criminals to take action, experts said.

"I think this is when it's most important for us to be visible, ... when it's warmer," Bieker said.

Numbers game

Local crime statistics are mirroring the temperature trend this year, the newspaper's analysis found.

Temperatures in the area for both January and February this year were below normal, according to Mark Steinwedel, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service.

During both those months, Fort Wayne police received fewer calls compared with the five-year average for those same months.

But March and April had above-average temperatures. In April, the average temperature was 7.5 degrees above normal, Steinwedel said. Police calls in March and April were up by about 600 and 200 calls, respectively, compared with the five-year average for March and April.

"There is no doubt a connection between crime and temperature," said Jospeter Mbuba, an assistant professor at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne who has taught criminal justice courses for

CRIME

Continued from Page 1C

more than 10 years.

Average monthly calls for service reported to Fort Wayne police over a five-year period show police receive more than 17,200 calls during May, June and July.

That drops off to between 13,400 and 13,700 calls on average in December and January, and about 12,800 in February, the shortest month of the year.

"When it's really cold, we see criminal activity drop off," said Capt. P.J. Smith, who oversees patrol officers on the city's northwest side. "Thieves by nature are lazy. ... They are not going to go out and get cold and wet."

Other months do not show as much change as those peak warm and cold months.

December is typically a busy month for law enforcement when it comes to property crime, including theft from vehicles and burglaries. When people are out of town for the holidays or leave gifts visible in their homes, thieves are more apt to make a move, said Jerome McKean, an associate professor in criminal justice at Ball State University.

Along with those property crimes come a larger number of thefts from retailers, he said.

Recipe for crime

Ellen Cohn, an associate professor at Florida International University, has examined the link between crime and weather for more than 20 years.

She said three variables must be present for a crime to happen: a motivated offender, a suitable target (a person or object) and the absence of a capable guardian for that target. And those variables can be greatly affected by temperatures, she said.

"Routine activities affect how vulnerable you will be to crime," Cohn said. "There are more people out there available to be criminals, more people out there available to be victims. When it's warm out, people tend to be outside more."

Personal and violent crimes peak the most during warm months, IPFW's Mbuba said. People are also more apt to go on vacation during the summer months — leaving their homes more at risk for burglary and theft, McKean said.

Hot and angry

Those who don't leave home face their own hurdles.

Steve Stone, owner of Covert Surveillance & Investigation Inc., which employs officers to provide armed security and surveillance to a number of Fort Wayne apartment complexes, said reports of domestic disturbances drop dramatically when air conditioners are installed in apartments.

"If its too hot inside, you sit outside," he said. "When it's hot, tempers flare, you're more annoyed, more irritable."

That can lead to more arguments among family members. In addition, when people are forced to sit outside to cool off, they are more likely to interact with their neighbors, said Stone, who is also an Allen County Sheriff's Department sergeant and has been in law enforcement for 25 years.

"The neighbors you heard playing loud music all winter are now sitting outside," he said. "They get into arguments and such."

Ball State's McKean agrees with Stone's observations but said there is a cap on heat-instigated crime. It's true people encounter more conflict when they are "cooped up with each other," McKean said. But at some point, the desire to get out of the heat becomes stronger than the desire to commit a crime, he said.

At what temperature that happens is not clear, Florida International's Cohn said.

How much a crime's rate of occurrence will be affected by temperature depends on the crime itself. Further, Cohn said, there is no high temperature that has been determined for criminal activity

to cease. What is considered "hot out" varies on an individual's preference and on what region of the country a person lives in.

Cohn also says that despite theories by some that rain or other inclement weather aids in crime deterrence, no studies have strongly supported this idea.

"Other variables have been looked at, and the results are inconsistent," she said.

Foot deterrence

Although it's too early to gauge this summer's temperatures, Fort Wayne police will continue to increase their visibility. Staffing levels are adjusted by several factors, primarily the number of calls police receive, said officer Raquel Foster, Fort Wayne police spokeswoman.

"That's how we'll determine how many officers we'll have out on the street," she said.

On the city's northwest side, Smith has made it a personal goal to work foot patrol in each of the 60 neighborhood associations in his sector.

"People will come up to you and tell you stuff that's going on," he said. "When you're in a car, you're going by so fast you miss what's happening."

Bieker, meanwhile, said he plans on taking Justice out on patrol as much as possible.

"Just seeing that dog and that officer out there, people know we are trying," he said.

habrams@jg.net