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**West Side crime rises
 Open doors attract criminals, police warn**

Adriana M. Chavez / El Paso Times

In her West Side neighborhood, Mary Alice Shashy notices open garage doors and car windows that are also open invitations to criminals.

"It's incredible how people are so trusting," said Shashy, the co-chairwoman of the Westside Regional Command's Citizens Advisory Board.

Statistics from the beginning of the year through July 1 showed that crime on the West Side has increased 8 percent since the same period last year. The biggest increases included vehicle theft, which increased 12 percent, and burglary of vehicle, which increased 18 percent. The number of assaults reported on the



El Paso police
 Officer Joe Milian inspected the home of Mary Alice Shashy on Friday for security. (Mark Lambie / El Paso Times)

West Side increased the most, 20 percent.

But Shashy said she believes the statistics don't necessarily reflect an increase in crime, but instead reflect an increase in people reporting crimes.

"I think more people are reporting it now," Shashy said. "They know there's going to be consequences compared to years past."

Police recently said that officers will be knocking on the doors of people who own high-theft vehicles in an effort to prevent auto thefts, and officers are also increasing efforts to educate the public on how to protect their vehicles.

However, last month several residents of West Side apartment complexes became the victims of a rash of vehicle burglaries, in which robbers stole electronics, passports, credit cards and other items, said Officer Curtis Whitener, the command's community service officer.

Twenty-three vehicles were burglarized between May 2 and July 5 outside of apartment complexes on Bandolero, Acacia, South Mesa Hills and Wallenburg streets, Whitener said.

Officer Joe Milian, the West Side's crime prevention officer, said the increase in auto thefts and burglaries could be due to the increasing number of shopping centers and apartment complexes, and the presence of high-volume parking lots, such as those at the Cinemark movie theater and Sunland Park Mall.



Officer Joe Milian inspects the windows for secondary locks. (Mark Lambie / El Paso Times)

"A lot of times people are leaving vehicles running outside of convenience stores, and they don't realize they're helping the criminal," Milian said. "Crime in El Paso is very opportunistic."

Milian said the best theft deterrents include after-market alarm systems and fuel shut-off switches, but sometimes even a simpler such as The Club deters a thief as well.

However, many car owners don't want to bother with activating these devices, Milian said.

"It takes three to four minutes to activate the proper safety devices in a vehicle. (Car owners) should take the time to activate them," Milian said.

Milian also advised vehicle owners to hide all

valuables left in a car.

A crime that has decreased on the West Side is burglary. Last summer, Westsiders saw a trend of rising home burglaries, which are sometimes common in the summer because residents often leave garage doors, windows and doors open to relieve the heat.

Shashy said that despite what crime numbers indicate, she still considers the West Side a safe place to live. "I wouldn't live anywhere else," she said.

Anyone interested in a home safety inspection or starting a Neighborhood Watch may call Milian at 585-6124.

Adriana M. Chávez may be reached at achavez@elpasotimes.com; 546-6117.

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