

## State crime up

CBI cites increase in five major categories for 2004

**By Julie Poppen, Rocky Mountain News  
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Murders in Colorado increased 18.5 percent last year, according to a report released Friday, part of an overall surge in major crimes of 8.7 percent.

The number of motor vehicle thefts in 2004 reached its highest point in at least 15 years, according to the report issued by the Colorado Bureau of Investigation.

In 2004, 22,971 vehicles were stolen across Colorado - a 13.9 percent increase over 2003.

In 2004, 199 homicides were reported in Colorado compared to 168 in 2003.

Even when factored for population growth, there were increases in each major crime rate in 2004.

"It is a fact that homicides went up, but the arrest rate for homicides rose even higher, which indicates Colorado law enforcement is doing a great job at solving serious crimes," said Patrick Maroney, CBI agent in charge for uniform crime reporting.

In 2004, June was the deadliest month: 24 people were killed. December was the quietest with five murders.

Guns were used in 116 of the 199 cases. Sixty-seven percent of the offenders were male. Men comprised 71 percent of the murder victims.

The CBI numbers show 87 murders in Denver and two negligent manslaughters in 2004.

The numbers are slightly lower than those previously reported by Denver police, probably due to different classification systems. For example, CBI does not count the three fatal police involved shootings in Denver that year in its murder numbers. Denver police do.

The city's homicide rate plays a significant role in shaping statewide crime numbers. Denver police Division Chief David Fisher said he can't explain the homicidal impulse that descended upon Denver in 2004.

"There are lot of opinions," Fisher said. "It's difficult to predict the evil side of human nature."

While Fisher doesn't want to jinx Denver, he said things are looking up so far this year. As of Friday, there had been 22 homicides compared to 51 at this point one year ago.

Cathy Phelps, executive director of the Denver Center for Crime Victims, said her agency's resources have been sapped by the 2004 murders in Denver.

"It felt like (the murder rate) had grown off the charts," Phelps said. "In the last year we have served more homicide witnesses and their children than we have ever served."

The agency opened in 1987 and has served 100,000 crime victims, witnesses and family members.

In the past year, the center created a new program for children who have witnessed killings.

"Mostly it involves letting kids share their feelings and grief about it," Phelps said. "We try to work with families and their neighborhoods so they feel if something were to happen they'd have a resource."

CBI officials said Colorado remains below the national average in most major crime categories except for motor vehicle thefts.

In 2003, Colorado ranked 12th in the nation for the number of motor vehicle thefts per 100,000 people, CBI spokesman Lance Clem said.

Clem said there are typically more vehicle thefts in the western states. "Vehicles are stolen and taken to Mexico," Clem said.

El Paso County Sheriff's Office crime analyst Caryn Shetterly has another idea about what motivates people to steal cars.

"A common theory is that at least some are due to the methamphetamine craze because that's how a lot of them get parts or crush cars and get money," Shetterly said.

Shetterly said juveniles also account for many of the suspects in motor vehicle thefts. El Paso County reported 282 motor vehicle thefts in 2004, up from 223 in 2003.

Shetterly was surprised but not overly concerned by the increase in homicides statewide. In El Paso County there were two homicides in 2004, down from five in 2003.

"For us and for Colorado Springs, almost all of our murders and aggravated assaults are people who know each other, so it's not random murders we're dealing with," Shetterly said. "I consider that a weird comfort factor."

Murder rates have remained constant in Colorado Springs in recent years, Colorado Springs Lt. Rafael Citron said. Between 2003 and 2004, the number of homicides dropped from 18 to 14.

"We usually average between 16 to 20 homicides per year," Citron said. The city of Aurora reported 13 homicides in 2004, down from 18 in 2003. And, while CBI records show an increase in motor vehicle thefts, Aurora Police Department spokeswoman Kathleen Walsh said the numbers actually declined.

Walsh said there may be discrepancies because Aurora police don't call CBI each time that they learn a vehicle reported stolen wasn't.

According to Aurora's public safety report, there were 2,564 stolen vehicles in 2003 compared to 2,410 last year.

"Aurora's very active when it comes to motor vehicle theft," Walsh said. "We prosecute individuals through municipal court so we know there are consequences. They actually have to serve jail time."

**Numbers on the rise**

Percent	2003	2004	% change
Homicide	168	199	18.5
Rape	1,797	1,870	4.1
Robbery	3,577	3,637	1.7
Burglary	29,830	31,690	6.2
Auto theft	20,176	22,971	13.9