

California has Highest Rate of Crime Against Jewelry Industry, Grab and Run on Rise

The jewelry industry loses more than \$100 million dollars every year to theft, according to the FBI, with the crimes often resulting in serious injury or death. Thefts are often committed by organized criminal or theft groups, and Jewelers' Security Alliance reports that in 2005 there were 1275 crimes against the jewelry industry. California had the highest incidence of crime in the nation, with 167 crimes, and 58 corresponding arrests. Texas and Florida had the next highest rates, with 113 and 106 respectively. There were 5% fewer criminal events in 2005, but dollar losses from those crimes were up 5% from 2004.

"Grab and run", when someone asks to see a particular piece of jewelry and then runs away has significantly increased. During 2006 the number of grab and run cases reported to JSA was 419. This is an increase of 146% from 2005 when JSA recorded only 170 grab and run crimes.

For over twenty years, South American theft groups (SATGs), usually from Colombia, have committed numerous thefts against retail stores and traveling salesmen. Robberies in retail settings are usually "smash and grab" or the thieves cut through the gates of a closed store. One crew alone robbed fifty-seven jewelry stores on the east coast starting in 2003, stealing over \$5 million in jewelry. They targeted stores in malls, stealing gold chains and designer watches, but did not attempt to break into the safes.

Commonly, jewelry is stolen in one city and fenced in another, and the proceeds are then laundered in another city or country. Many fences will even travel across the country, or around the world to buy stolen goods. The most popular fencing cities are New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Houston. The FBI created the Jewelry and Gem Program in 1992 to respond to the rise in thefts and their increasing violence. There have been some arrests in the past few years and the activity of the gangs has been interrupted, but far from completely.

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