

City homicides drop to seven-year low

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Homicides in Buffalo hit a seven-year low in the first quarter of 2008, and police officials think crackdowns on drugs and gang activity are making a difference.

Seven people were murdered in the city from January through March, down from 11 homicides during the same period a year ago. In 2006, there were 14 homicides in the first quarter.

Chief of Detectives Dennis Richards said some other localities have seen homicide rates increase in recent months.

“We’re doing something right in the City of Buffalo,” Richards told Mayor Byron W. Brown during a presentation Wednesday before the city’s accountability panel.

Studies have shown that 90 percent of all homicides are linked to narcotics or alcohol. One of the Police Department’s major initiatives since Brown took office involves a Mobile Response Unit, a team of tactical officers targeting narcotics, gangs and illegal guns.

In the first three months of the year, the unit logged a 46 percent increase in arrests and a 94 percent increase in gun seizures when compared with 2007 figures. The number of search warrants executed rose by nearly 55 percent, and the unit almost doubled the amount of cash it seized from suspects, confiscating nearly \$92,000.

Brown praised the Police Department for making significant headway. But he also raised concerns about a 5.5 percent increase in property crimes over last year’s levels. Richards and Deputy Police Commissioner Byron Lockwood said some of the increase has been driven by a rise in the number of thefts of copper wire and pipes.

“The price of copper has gone up significantly,” Richards told the CitiStat panel.

Lockwood added that the large number of vacant properties in the city had compounded problems involving the theft of copper.

The accountability panel did not review data for other types of crimes. Staffers were still preparing quarterly statistics for assaults, robberies and rapes.

But some categories of violent crime were up over 2007 figures. Law enforcement officials had earlier described the increase as an anomaly fueled by January’s warmer weather.