

Weather blamed for increase in some January crime figures

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Crime in the city increased in January when compared with the same period a year ago, but law enforcement officials insist the numbers are an anomaly fueled by warmer weather.

Police officials assured Buffalo's accountability panel Wednesday that February's crime figures will look better. They also were quick to point out that violent crime was down 11.8 percent last year, compared with 2006.

January's spike in most types of crime was red-flagged by First Deputy Mayor Steven M. Casey during a CitiStat meeting. Violent crime was up 18.3 percent in January from a year earlier, including a 26.4 percent increase in robberies. Property crime increased 7.3 percent, including a nearly 34 percent increase in the number of stolen vehicles.

But there were 8.4 percent fewer burglaries in January, and only two homicides, compared with four a year earlier.

Deputy Police Commissioner Daniel Derenda thinks a warmer January caused the short-term spike. Police officials argued that one-month trends don't give a true picture of what has happened since Byron W. Brown took office in 2006.

"You've seen crime come down steadily in the last two years, with 90 less officers," Derenda said.

The recent hiring of 89 new officers will increase police presence and help deter crime, Police Commissioner H. McCarthy Gipson told the accountability panel.

"All of these crimes are impacted by the visibility of police on the streets to a certain extent," Gipson said.

The commissioner also released statistics from the department's Mobile Response Unit, a team of tactical officers targeting gangs, narcotics and illegal guns. The unit has seen dramatic increases in arrests, search warrants and gun seizures since it was created a little over a year ago.

The Police Department continues to crack down on drug-related crimes, Gipson said. Officials discussed last month's roundup of 52 suspects who were allegedly part of a drug network operating mostly in South Buffalo. Gipson said the crackdown "will be coming to a neighborhood near you."

