Crime Rates Drop Again in California

"3 strikes" law cited as reason for big decline

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Crime in California dropped 7 percent during the first six months of 1995, with double-digit decreases in homicide, rape and robbery, according to statistics released yesterday by the state attorney general's office.

The decline follows a trend that began in 1993 and continued in 1994, when all six major types of crime measured by the state fell for the first time in recent years.

"This is one of the most remarkable years we've had," said Attorney General Dan Lungren in presenting the statistics. "You can't laugh at or ignore significant drops in crime."

Lungren credited the continuing decline to the deterrent value of the so-called "three strikes and you're out" sentencing law, which was enacted in March 1994.

The law requires a person convicted of a third felony after conviction of two previous felonies to serve at least 25 years to life in prison.

Lungren's statistics, culled from the 63 largest law enforcement agencies in California, show that the number of homicides reported fell 10.6 percent from the same period in 1994. Rapes dropped 10.8 percent. Robberies fell the most — 12.7 percent.

National statistics gathered by the FBI show that the incidence of crime fell 3 percent in 1994 from 1993. No preliminary statistics are available for this year. By comparison, crime in California dropped 5.2 percent in 1994 from 1993 levels.

The state's overall crime rate has been declining since 1983, but the past three years have shown the most substantial declines. Lungren said crime rates now are back to the levels of the 1970s.

California measures six types of crimes — homicide, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary and motor vehicle theft.

In the unincorporated areas of Alameda County, the number of homicides rose from three to five. In Berkeley, homicides were unchanged between the two years, at five. The Oakland Police Department has not provided statistics, Lungren said.

In Contra Costa County, homicides dropped from 14 during the first six months of 1994 to 13 in 1995. Homicides in Concord were unchanged at 11, while the number of reported robberies declined from 111 to 67 — a 40 percent tumble.

The Santa Clara County Sheriff's Department reported a drop in homicides from six to one but had 19 reported rapes in 1995, up from 17 in 1994.

In Sunnyvale, the number of homicides doubled to two. The number of rapes reported was unchanged at 15, while robberies and aggravated assaults both fell by 30 percent.

San Jose saw an increase in the number of reported crimes, with 98 homicides, 262 rapes, 1,357 robberies and 4,354 aggravated assaults.

In the city of San Francisco, there were 36 homicides, 68 rapes, 328 robberies and 1,096 aggravated assaults.