

My goal in writing these messages is to cover topics that people find relevant to their lives. Crime report data from our records helps to keep the message relevant by revealing what crimes our citizens are most likely to encounter. Today, I'd like to touch on the "Big Three" most reported crimes in the sheriff's office in 2024 and what can be done to mitigate the effects of these crimes.

Surging to the top position in reported crimes this year is Domestic Assault. Domestic Assault is a crime driven by complex relationship dynamics. Abusive relationships rarely begin with physical violence. Relationships devolve into physical violence over time through a process where the abuser gains increasing power and control over the victim. Because of the power and control dynamics that exist in relationships afflicted with domestic violence, there is no easy solution for victims. If you or someone you know is a victim of domestic violence, help is available. The advocates at Anna Marie's Alliance in St. Cloud are available to help victims obtain shelter, construct a safety plan, and access necessary services. Escaping domestic violence is a process that might take time and involve more than one attempt to break free. Patience and persistence in offering help to victims is the key. Law enforcement is ready to assist in these cases. Holding perpetrators accountable, referring victims to services, and enforcing court orders offers help and hope to victims seeking to escape the trap of domestic violence. Most importantly, everyone can clearly say in our words and show in our actions that domestic violence is not acceptable. This behavior is often learned behavior passed from one generation to the next. We all need to be part of the collective voice that breaks this cycle and says this is not OK.

Theft, our constant companion in the most reported crimes list, comes in at number two. From the time people first conceived of personal property, there have been those who have sought to steal that property. Theft prevention is rooted in making the crime as difficult or risky as possible for the thief. Many of the thefts that take place each year are crimes of opportunity. Removing the opportunity will keep most thieves away from your property. When implementing crime prevention strategies against theft, look at your property and think about the level of difficulty involved in stealing things in and around your home. What strategies could you employ to make seeing your valuables, accessing your valuables, and taking your valuables more difficult? Are your vehicles and outbuildings locked? Is your home and yard well-lit? Are valuables kept out of sight from passersby? Theft prevention doesn't have to be complex. There is still much value to be found in the simple steps of locking doors, installing lights, and securing keys. Of note for properties outside city limits is a rise in reported thefts from unoccupied buildings. Many of the theft reports we've taken in the past year have been from outbuildings on unoccupied properties (like hunting land) or from buildings at abandoned properties (like unoccupied farmsteads). Owners of these properties should consider removing valuables from the property or finding ways to closely monitor people coming and going from the property. Strategies might include alerting neighbors to call if they see anything suspicious or installing a surveillance system to safeguard the property.

Holding down the third place in the most reported crimes in 2024 is Harassment. In the midst of the LA riots in 1992, Rodney King asked, "can we all get along?" While the times and the troubles that brought Mr. King to utter this wish for peace were certainly weightier than the conflicts routinely reported to our office, each one of these conflicts is felt personally and deeply by those involved. We all have our own learned strategies for how we deal with conflict. Based upon 30 years of law enforcement experience, I will tell you that strategies which involve escalating or continuing the conflict are rarely effective. Law enforcement and the courts are available to people who are involved in conflicts that are not easily solved person to person. Some common solutions we have seen that are successful in diffusing

conflicts include trespassing a problematic person from private property, blocking communication with an agitated person, or obtaining a harassment restraining order from the court. For those rare cases where these conflicts reach the level of stalking, assaultive behavior, or court order violations, law enforcement is ready and willing to hold people accountable for these crimes. In all these situations, be the person who works to diffuse the situation to create a better tomorrow.

In closing, I'd like to thank all of you for the support and partnership we receive from the people of Benton County in our mission to keep Benton County safe. We are truly fortunate to have an involved group of citizens, public-safety minded leaders, and dedicated public safety partners. All of us at the Benton County Sheriff's Office wish you a Merry Christmas and a happy and safe New Year! For more crime prevention information and safety information visit the Benton County Sheriff's Office website at: <https://www.co.benton.mn.us/211/Crime-Prevention>. You can also like and follow us on Facebook and Twitter at @BentonMNSheriff for regular updates and crime prevention messages.