

Are Houstonians Really Safe? Majority of Houstonians Say Not So Much!

Written by Jeffrey L. Boney Associate Editor
Wednesday, 15 May 2013 00:00



If you talk to many older people, you will hear many of them talk about the times when they could relax in their home while leaving the door unlocked or even sleeping with the window open.

Long gone are those days. The state of crime and the nature of criminals have changed the game tremendously. If you do not secure your home properly these days, some stranger could be inside your house taking all of the things you worked so hard to attain or possibly even break into your home and put your life at risk.

Whatever the case may be, these days you will find that in many communities across the United States, citizens have to worry about criminals and how to feel safe and secure within the city and communities in which they live.

HOUSTONIANS FEEL LESS SAFE

According to a recent Gallup poll, the Houston, Sugar Land and Baytown region are considered to be among the least safe U.S. metro areas, according to resident confidence in the safety of where they live.

Only 63 percent of those polled in the Houston area responded that they felt safe walking alone at night in the area they reside. The poll measured the 50 largest metro areas in the U.S. for self-reported feelings of security. Only Jacksonville, Florida (63%), Riverside, California (61%), and New Orleans, Louisiana (59%), find themselves at the bottom of the list as the least-safest

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metro areas in the poll.

The data is based on Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index data collected throughout 2012. The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index tracks wellbeing in the U.S. Results are based on telephone interviews conducted as part of Gallup Daily tracking Jan. 1-Dec. 31, 2012, with random samples of adults, aged 18 and older, living in the 50 largest Metropolitan Statistical Areas by population.

In an official statement to the Houston Forward Times, the Houston Police Department (HPD) states, "These numbers are very interesting and point to a public perception that differs from our local crime statistics, which indicate the Houston crime rate is at its lowest per capita rate in decades. HPD would like to delve deeper into this to find out why that difference exists because we want our citizens to feel as safe as we believe they are. One crime is one crime too many."

To come up with their findings, Gallup asked Americans each night whether they "feel safe walking alone at night in the city or area where you live?" and then they compiled the data and weighted each sample to make sure it was demographically representative of that MSA. Margins of error for individual MSAs are no greater than ± 4 percentage points, and are ± 3 percentage points in most MSAs. Interviews are conducted with respondents on landline telephones and cellular phones, with interviews conducted in Spanish for respondents who are primarily Spanish-speaking. Samples are weighted by gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, education, region, adults in the household, and phone status (cellphone only/landline only/both, cellphone mostly, and having an unlisted landline number). Demographic weighting targets are based on the March 2011 Current Population Survey figures for the aged 18 and older non-institutionalized population living in U.S. telephone households.

HPD states that HPD Police Chief Charles McClelland meets with his commanders every other week to discuss crime strategies and how best to tackle those problem areas, along with having a robust community outreach program designed to inform residents of the steps they can take to reduce the possibility they will become crime victims.

MOST DANGEROUS NEIGHBORHOODS IN HOUSTON?

A recent study, done by NeighborhoodScout, reported that two Houston-area communities have

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been ranked among the nation's 25 most dangerous neighborhoods.

According to NeighborhoodScout, they have Sunnyside listed as the sixth-most dangerous and Third Ward listed as the 15th most dangerous neighborhoods in America. NeighborhoodScout states that according to their research, residents in Sunnyside have a 1 in 11 chance of becoming a victim of crime in one year, while residents in Third Ward have a 1 in 13 chance of becoming a victim of crime in one year.

NeighborhoodScout annually comes out with a list of the 25 most dangerous neighborhoods in America based on research on the predicted number of violent crimes per 1,000 neighborhood residents. The violent crimes included in their research are the violent crimes from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports: homicide, forcible rape, armed robbery, and aggravated assault. NeighborhoodScout defines neighborhoods as census tracts, which are the official government designation for a neighborhood, so they can be consistent nationwide in their definition and boundaries. To be considered for their list, the neighborhood has to have at least 800 year-round residents, and be primarily residential in character, although it does not have to be completely residential. The neighborhood also has to reside in a community whose law enforcement agency(ies) reported to the FBI.

Houston mayoral candidate Ben Hall states that he doesn't believe the Sunnyside and Third Ward communities should be singled out as being more dangerous than any other community, but that more conversation surrounding the issue of crime should be louder coming from City Hall and that the tone should be more aggressive.

"I don't have the experiences or data sources that these researchers used to come up with their findings, but I do know that there are wonderful people who live in these communities who deserve to feel safe and proud about where they live," says Hall. "We need to make sure that all communities never appear on a report that puts Houston in a negative light and makes its' residents feel unsafe."

Hall supports the use of new technology across the city and in areas that have a high propensity for crime and providing private land owners with tax subsidies to encourage the use of surveillance devices that won't invade on the privacy of law-abiding citizens, but will help deter crime in the city.

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Rev. James E. Nash, who is a member of the Houston Ministers Against Crime and serves as the pastor of St. Paul Baptist Church, located in Sunnyside, expressed his disappointment at the reported findings and doesn't believe it is representative of his neighborhood.

"I have been in Sunnyside all my life and I was appalled when it was said that Sunnyside was the sixth most dangerous place to live in the nation," said Nash. "I choose to live in Sunnyside because I want to, not because I have to. We have problems like other neighborhoods, but the sixth most dangerous place to live--man give me a break!"

Nash states that crime is a major issue that must be dealt with, but believes that elected officials should have aggressively spoken out against these findings when they were first reported. Nash believes that this is an attempt to damage the historic reputation of the Sunnyside and Third Ward communities and eventually take over the area.

"Being situated at 288 and 610, between Pearland and the Medical Center, and Downtown looming over old Sunnyside, I am scared to death. We will see the name Sunnyside become history as Fourth Ward and Third Ward," says Nash. "Leaders are too quiet as to the plans they have for us."

Whether these reports are true or not, the issue of crime is something that is important to all residents and ensuring that the citizens of Houston are safe and protected should be priority #1.

If you are the victim of a crime or believe your neighborhood is negatively impacted by crime, HPD has various programs designed to target hot spots for criminal activity which include the 24-7 Real Time Crime Center and the Crime Reduction Unit which specializes in saturating those hot spot areas to reduce crime. Please contact HPD for information on arranging a safety presentation to your organization by an HPD officer.