

## **RURAL RESIDENTS – PROTECT YOURSELVES FROM CRIME!**

Rural areas are generally safer and have fewer crime problems than cities. But research suggests that rural areas have their own unique crime problems and that these problems may be growing. Factors such as improved roads, people spending more time away from their homes and easier access to drugs and alcohol all contribute to crime in rural areas. How much do you know about rural crime? Take this quiz and find out!

1. In general, rural youth begin using both legal and illegal drugs at a younger age than urban youth. True or false?
2. Illegal drug labs are often set up in rural areas because they are less likely to be discovered. True or false?
3. Arrests for driving under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol are generally more common in rural areas. True or false?
4. Gangs and organized crime do not affect rural areas. True or false?
5. Farms located near major roads are more likely to become targets of theft. True or false?

Numbers 1, 2 and 3 are True, number 4 is False and number 5 is True.

You may have been surprised at some of the answers. But it's important to remember that by being aware, you can help prevent crime and make your community safer. The first thing to do is make sure you, your family, and your home are as safe as possible.

### *Protect Your Home and Family*

- Make sure outside doors in your home and outbuildings are solid metal or wood (and without glass panels that can easily be broken). Doors should fit tightly in their frames and have deadbolt locks.
- Secure sliding glass doors with commercially available locks or with a rigid wooden dowel in the track. Keep windows locked.
- Keep valuable items such as antiques and guns hidden from outside view.
- Warn potential thieves that you are on the alert with “No Trespassing”, “No Hunting” and “Beware of Dog” signs around your property.
- Install good lights around your house, yard, barns and gas pumps. Use them!
- Consider motion sensors that set off lights outside. Use timers to turn lights and TVs on and off at appropriate times when you're away.
- When you go away, ask a neighbor to pick up your mail and newspapers. This creates the illusion that someone is home and following everyday routines. Have neighbors check your property, and return the favor when they go out of town.

### *Be A Good Neighbor!*

No matter where you live, it's important to be a good neighbor. It just makes sense. When neighbors look out for one another, it builds good feelings and lets potential criminals know they are not welcome in your community! Remember that the police cannot be everywhere at all times, and since you are a constant presence in your areas,

you should know better what goes on day to day. So look out for anything suspicious, and talk to your neighbors and police. Being a good neighbor may be the most effective crime prevention tool of all. Everyone wants the best quality of life possible. This depends on having neighbors you can trust and feeling a real sense of safety in your community. The idea of crime causes fear in the community, thereby diminishing the quality of life for everyone. So be a good neighbor and work together for a safer community.

#### *Here Are Some Problems and Solutions*

**Problem:** Alcohol use by young people is more common in rural areas. Self-reported surveys show that rural youth begin using both legal and illegal drugs at a younger age than urban youth. A particular problem in rural areas is driving under the influence. People spend more time in their cars, the distances traveled while intoxicated may be greater, and roads may be narrow and poorly lit. Therefore, accidents are more likely to happen. In fact, some studies show that more people are arrested for DUI in rural areas than in cities.

**What You Can Do:** Work for recreational opportunities for teens. Many young people start dabbling in drugs out of boredom, so don't let them get bored. Work with schools, 4-H, or Future Farmers of America to fill the gaps, both after school and on weekends. If your school district doesn't have an alcohol, drug and crime prevention curriculum in place, help start one.

Significant research shows that drug and alcohol abuse is the root cause of so many crime problems. Therefore, it makes sense that if the community works to reduce alcohol and drug problems, it reduces the probability of theft, burglary and other serious crime problems.

**Problem:** Spousal and child abuse continues to be a serious crime everywhere, including rural communities. This crime not only affects the whole household, but everyone who comes in contact with it. For example, children often witness fights between their mom and dad. The children may be traumatized by the violence and take that hostility to school. They may become difficult or violent, affecting everyone there. And the cycle goes on.

**What You Can Do:** If you or someone you know is being abused by someone, call the national domestic violence hotline, toll free at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233). The Telecommunications Device for the Deaf(TDD) number is 1-800-787-3224. You can get help.

Tell a trusted family member or friend what happened. Report it to the police; domestic violence is a crime. Be supportive of victims, and let them know it's not their fault. Find out about domestic violence shelters closest to you and work to educate everyone about this very real problem.

**Problem:** Rural areas are popular sites for drug growing and manufacturing. Reports suggest that rural areas may serve as production sites for methamphetamine, designer drugs, crack, and marijuana. Clandestine drug labs are often set up in rural areas, where strong fumes, suspicious bottles, and vats of chemicals are less likely to be detected. In addition, some studies of commercial marijuana growers found they were almost exclusively rural operations.

Also, some reports show that rural areas have become major transshipment points for drugs destined for urban areas. Many times, these operations are run by gangs and professional crime rings.

**What You Can Do:** Keep an eye out for any suspicious activity in your area and report it to police. Talk with your neighbors and local police about setting up a Neighborhood Watch Group. Work with local businesses and encourage people of all ages to help.

*Provided by the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority*