

For Albuquerque businesses, the cost of crime adds up to more than what's taken

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Shattered glass, broken doors, vulnerable vents, new alarms. The cost to a business that has experienced a break in and/or theft can be much more than just stolen items.

[Walter Viga](#), owner of Northeast Cyclery, said his shop was broken into in summer 2019. Two laptops and one bike were stolen, about \$1,500 to \$2,000 worth of property, he said.

"[The thieves] came in through the air vent, the AC, and they were able to kind of pull away the heater and come down through the vent," Viga said. "What ended up happening is they took one of the bikes that happened to not be locked up."

Viga said thankfully, the bike that was taken wasn't one of the costlier models. Some bikes can be over \$5,000, but he said this was a used BMX bike.

Crime can cost a business — in money, time, workload and peace of mind. It also impacts the community. Many businesses might steer clear of areas perceived as having high crime, which can hinder economic development in those areas.

In 2017, the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported the federal, state and local government spent more than \$280 billion in 2012 on criminal justice, including police protection, the court system and prisons, according to the Department of Justice. Various researchers have estimated the annual costs of crime in the U.S. to be anywhere from \$690 billion to \$341 trillion, depending on the variables taken into account and the intangible costs of crime.

When criminals target a local business owner, they bear the associated costs.

Wright's Indian Art was broken into in April, Director [Dan Hyman](#) said. The 113-year-old business, located near Uptown, was closed because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Wright's sells handmade Native American art.

Hyman said the thieves used heavy duty tools to break through the front door — which had security measures such as glass coating and gasket seals — and stole jewelry, bolo ties, pottery and some other items. He estimated the theft and

damage done on the business was about \$30,000. He said the store has seen seven break-in attempts in the last three and a half years.

"We're lucky [they] didn't get a lot more," Hyman said.

Measures to prevent crime can be costly, too. Businesses without a security system are 4.5 times more likely to be burglarized, according to Advanced Security Technologies LLC.

Viga said after the break-in, he put bars in the vents to prevent the same thing from happening, and installed a double barrel lock on the back door that requires a key to open from the inside. He said he also put a door jam on the front door.

Hyman said they added motorized gates on the inside of the entryway, which cost about \$11,000.

Albuquerque Police Department interim chief of police [Harold Medina](#) said estimating the total cost of crime in Albuquerque is difficult because so many things go into it.

"You have the costs in terms of businesses and what they are losing out, but also includes the resources the public puts into trying to prevent crimes," he said.

From the police department budget to the corrections and justice departments, in addition to the costs from the public, he estimates the total cost of crime in the city would probably be in the billions.

Medina took over the interim chief of police position in September, when [Mayor Tim Keller](#) announced Chief Michael Geier would retire Sept. 18.

One of the most costly crimes for businesses that is the easiest to commit, according to Medina, is the theft of copper material. Whether from active construction sites or completed buildings, the cost can be large to replace the materials and to make repairs, such as redoing walls that may have been damaged in the process, hiring an electrician and more.

Another large cost to business owners can stem from broken windows, usually associated with break-ins or vandalism, Medina said. Earlier this spring, commercial burglaries went up as businesses were closed because of the coronavirus.

"We reacted quickly as a department when we saw the increase in commercial burglary," Medina said. "We added that as a priority for us."

Hyman said his experience with the police "was extremely good during the break-in" but said afterward it went downhill, and he has given up following up with the police now.

Medina added that in the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, some crimes such as auto theft and residential burglary saw a decrease, while commercial burglary increased. He said as the year went on, those crimes evened out some and things such as auto theft and burglary have gone back up.

One piece of advice Medina has for businesses wanting to evaluate or increase their security is to reach out to their local APD substation and request a crime prevention specialist to visit and do an analysis of the property. He said they can suggest measures the business can put in place to help deter crime, such as a security door or video surveillance.

While there aren't many studies to back up how effective video surveillance can be in deterring crime at businesses, one review, sponsored by the Campbell Collaboration and cited by Cornell University, found the use of closed-circuit television, or CCTV, resulted in a 51% decrease in crimes committed in parking lots.

Even after repairing damage and replacing property, businesses still have a long way to go in dealing with a crime. Working with insurance can be time-consuming — Hyman said it took over two and a half months with his insurance, and he is still working out some smaller details. Worry, security measures and more can take a toll on a business.

"We're never going to be made whole on that," Hyman said.

Collin Krabbe assisted with reporting for this story.