Chief warns of crime stats change

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Abstract:
The Springfield Police Department is switching to a new system for tracking crime data that's more specific, contains more types of offenses and allows police to enter more than one offense per incident. Since 2001, the police department has been using an FBI program called Uniform Crime Reporting, which tracks eight index crimes.

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Full text:
Springfield Police Chief Paul Williams said the community will likely see a jump in crime numbers starting next year -- but not for the reasons you might expect.
The Springfield Police Department is switching to a new system for tracking crime data that's more specific, contains more types of offenses and allows police to enter more than one offense per incident.
Since 2001, the police department has been using an FBI program called Uniform Crime Reporting, which tracks eight index crimes.
Williams said the FBI, by 2020, will no longer support UCR. Instead, the FBI is moving to the National Incident-Based Reporting System, which offers 38 additional crime categories.
Springfield Police Department spokeswoman Lisa Cox said participation in both systems is voluntary.
Williams gave a hypothetical example to illustrate the differences between the old and new crime tracking systems: "I break into your house, I steal your car, I rape your wife, I kill your dog and then on the way out I shoot and kill your neighbor, who tries to stop me."
Under the old system, Williams said, only the biggest crime -- murder -- would be recorded as a statistic.
The new system will recognize that burglary, auto theft, rape, animal cruelty and murder are all offenses related to one incident.
"You'll be surprised by the number of crimes occurring now that you don't hear about and aren't reported because we only track the most serious (offenses) and have since 1930," Williams said.
City Manager Greg Burris told Springfield City Council at a lunch meeting Tuesday it's important not to compare crime rate changes over the next few years.
"We might think we're comparing apples to apples but, in fact, we're comparing apples to oranges," Burris said.
Williams said the police department's computer system, bought five years ago, already has National Incident-Based Reporting System built into it.
"All we are going to do is flip the switch -- at no additional cost," Williams said.
Williams said the police department will be training staff in the new system to create a quality control unit within the records division.
Williams said he plans to make the switch in January.
Differences between UCR and NIBRS
NIBRS distinguishes between attempted and committed crimes, while UCR does not.
NIBRS collects weapon information on all violent offenses, not only for murder, robbery and aggravated assault, which is done with UCR.
Some crime categories counted in NIBRS system that don't appear in UCR include gambling offenses, kidnapping, fraud, pornography or obscene material, prostitution, embezzlement and bribery.

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