

E.P. County Attorney: 'Gang Problem Growing'

Posted: 7:08 pm PDT March 30, 2007

-- El Paso's county attorney believes the city has a gang problem and it may only be getting worse.

County Attorney Rodriguez said there is one gang that is especially growing--the Barrio Azteca gang.

"Some people don't think it is as serious as L.A. or San Antonio or other parts in Texas, but believe me we have a gang problem here in El Paso," Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez said the Barrio Azteca gang activity is rising along the borderland, especially in the Segundo Barrio, the Northeast and the Lower Valley.

While city officials are seeing a rise in these areas, residents have a different perspective.

"There have never been any gangs or any such activity like that around here," said Tom Bruce from the Lower Valley.

Bruce has lived in his house for more than 60 years and said he has never seen gang problems.

"We haven't got any graffiti on any of our property," Bruce said.

Down the street, Joe Lucero who's lived at his home for over 20 years and said he's never noticed any gang activity either.

"It surprises me because we never had that kind of problem," Lucero said.

But, Rodriguez believes it's a problem that is slowly creeping into our community and steadily growing.

"They are very active they have over 2,000 members according to the El Paso police department," Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez believes the Azteca's are attracted to El Paso because of the accessibility to drugs from Mexico, and he said members tend to be active drug dealers. Which is why he said his office is working with law enforcement to establish another gang injunction.

An injunction is a lawsuit that if granted by the court limits or requires certain actions, like establishing a curfew and or prohibiting the use of cell phones or pagers in public areas.

Rodriguez said a injunction was placed on the Azteca gang in 2003 to help decrease criminal activity within the city. Because of its success, Rodriguez said he is currently working to get another injunction in place against the gang.

"We are certainly interested in targeting them and hope we have enough evidence to establish a new injunction if necessary," he said.