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## **East Chicago Police Offer Up Their Lobby, Parking Lot for Craigslist Transactions.**

Buying or selling something on Craigslist near East Chicago and want a little peace of mind? Head to the police station.

The East Chicago Police Department is offering the use of its headquarters parking lot and lobby — with a police officer present, if you like — for residents looking for safe spaces to conduct transactions arranged online.

Dubbed “Operation Safe Sale,” authorities in the northwest Indiana town said the program is a response to safety threats for those engaging in cash transactions involving items advertised on the Web or other classified ads.

Tales of Craigslist-related assaults and robberies, where victims are lured to locations with the promise of a sale, aren’t uncommon.

A Boilingbrook man was robbed in Evanston at the beginning of the year when he attempted to buy a handful of smartphones from a Craigslist dealer for \$4,000, for example.

Mark J. Becker, chief of East Chicago’s police department, said an officer’s suggestion and a recent report of a Gary couple being robbed while trying to purchase a vehicle helped spur the program.

“I don’t know if it’s increasing, but it’s certainly been sustained,” Becker said of Craigslist-related crimes. “Certainly this has been going on for a long time, so why not make use of this building?”

Becker said the department will make every effort to have an officer available to oversee transactions Mondays through Fridays from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the department’s office, at 2301 E. Columbus Dr.

The chief said officers can also double-check whether, say, a car or television for sale has been reported stolen.

“Not that there aren’t idiot crooks out there, but who’s gonna be willing to come here with stolen items?” Becker said.

Residents can also use the police lot or lobby for business without an officer present at any time, Becker said.

After all, the department said, its parking lot and the lobby are both well-lit and offer extensive videotape coverage.

BY JUAN PEREZ JR., MCCLATCHY NEWS SERVICE / MAY 2, 20140

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