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Paintball pranksters shooting up Chicago Heights

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By Becky Schlikerman, staff writer

Michael Carter was walking down the street when a group of three guys pulled up, jumped out of their car and shot at him.

But they weren't shooting bullets. Instead, this group of pranksters splattered his body and face with pellets full of pink paint.

"I still got a spot in my face," said Carter, who was ambushed April 9 in the 1600 block of Fifth Avenue in Chicago Heights.

Carter is just one of at least eight city residents who have reported that they or their property have been attacked with paintballs since April 8. Three people have been hit by paintballs, and Carter said it hurts.

"It feels like somebody smacked you," he said.

Other incidents have involved people's homes and cars, police said.

"These are guys who think they're real funny. They drive around with a paintball gun and want to shoot at cars and people and intimidate them," Chicago Heights police Cmdr. Michael Brink said.

And it's happening citywide.

"They're not specific to any one area, so they're mobile," Brink said.

Although these are random acts, residents still are apprehensive when they find their property has been splattered.

Take Steve Walde, whose home in the 1600 block of Buena Vista Avenue was blasted with orange and green paint April 13.

"I had driven around the neighborhood that morning after I'd noticed what had happened and I didn't see anybody else's houses (had been shot at)," Walde said. "I thought maybe mine was being singled out for some reason."

But Brink said residents should not feel targeted.

"This is a random act. This is somebody who has a new toy they want to play with," Brink said.

Shirley Monskie said she isn't worried.

Her home in the 1300 block of Peggy Lane was blasted April 11 with bright green paint while she was out shopping.

"Immediately when we came back it's like 'What happened?' " Monskie said.

But she's sure it's just a prank.

"I think it's just kids going out with nothing to do," Monskie said.

Nevertheless, shooting at people or property with the paintball gun, used typically for recreation, comes with consequences.

The charges that can be brought upon a person accused of shooting paintball pellets depends on the extent of the injury or damage, Brink said.

He said charges in this "crime of opportunity" range from felony damage to property to misdemeanor battery.

"Say you're shooting at somebody with a paintball and you hit them in the eye and pop out their eye, that would be an aggravated battery," Brink said.

While Carter wasn't hurt, others have been injured.

Police said an 18-year-old resident was treated at St. James Hospital for bruises.

And that's just the basic type of injury, said Dr. Sudip Bose, an emergency room doctor at Advocate Christ Medical Center in Oak Lawn.

"When you have a projectile coming at you at a certain speed, it can definitely lead to injuries that won't harm you but they're painful, like bruising," Bose said. "If it hits you in the right place, like your eyeball, it can cause injuries that can be permanently disabling."

As for the homes, Monskie and Walde said they were able to clean up their home's windows and facade.

"Tide and water does a great job on it," Monskie said.

But property isn't always free of damage.

Police said the windows of a 1998 Chevrolet Malibu were shot out April 13 or 14 with paintballs, and there was green paint inside the car.

And Carter's clothes didn't make it out unscathed.

"I washed it but there's still some paint on it," he said.

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