BR tops list of cities with growing crime rate

By MARK LAMBERT

Baton Rouge may have one of the fastest growing crime rates in the country. The average population of the 10 cities was 534,800, according to the 1980 report of the Bureau of the Census. The same report showed Baton Rouge's population was 532,000.

Police Chief Wayne Rogillio has said crime is rising across the country, and Baton Rouge is feeling the effects of that wave.

However, the latest national figures released by the FBI showed a drop in the crime rate by 1.3% in 1984 compared to 1983. In those statistics, rape, aggravated assault, and auto theft rose in 1984, while murder, robbery, burglary, and larceny dropped.

Crime in Baton Rouge has been rising every month for the last 10 months, and police have been unable to keep pace with the increase, according to Baton Rouge City Police statistics.

Rogillio said lack of personnel has been a major problem in the department.

"We're about 58 people short," Rogillio said. "Certainly, that has to have an effect. As a result, a police presence is not there in the community. These officers are not able to patrol areas. We're all going from call to call.

"I think it would be interesting to know if those other cities you called have the same kind of problems we have," the chief said.

Public Information Officer Robert Ramick agreed that a lack of manpower has hurt police efforts in fighting crime.

"We don't have the time to follow up on things like we used to," he said. "Sometimes we write a report and then go straight to something else. Sometimes we just don't have the time or manpower to investigate things and follow up like we should."

Ramick said lack of good equipment also creates problems.

"These old cars are in pitiful condition," he said. "Some new cars and better equipment would go a long way."

In specific major offenses, Baton Rouge led the list of cities in burglary (43 percent increase), auto theft (111 percent increase) and tied with Atlanta in theft (24 percent increase). Baton Rouge's 46 percent increase in robbery was second to a 61 percent increase in Austin, Texas.

Nashville, Tenn., had the largest murder increase, a 68.8 percent rise, followed by Albuquerque, N.M., with 61.1 percent, and Charlotte, N.C., with a 37.1 percent increase. Baton Rouge had a 4 percent rise in the murder rate.

Figures from Mobile, Ala., showed the largest increase in rape (45.8 percent), followed by statistics from Austin (31 percent increase) and Dallas (18.3 percent increase). Incidents of rape in Baton Rouge have risen 1 percent in 1985.

Austin led in assaults with a 44 percent increase. Albuquerque was second with an 18.1 percent rise and Dallas was third with 15.7 percent. Baton Rouge experienced a 5 percent increase in assaults.

Following Austin and Baton Rouge in robbery was Albuquerque with a 30.9 percent increase. Following Baton Rouge in burglary increases were Austin (21 percent) and Atlanta (11 percent). Dallas was third in theft increases with a 20.8 percent increase, behind Baton Rouge and Atlanta.

Baton Rouge's 111 percent increase in auto thefts easily led the other 10 cities in that category. Albuquerque was second with a 30.5 percent increase, and Dallas was third with a 24.4 percent increase.

The cities in the survey that are larger than Baton Rouge are Atlanta (425,000), Austin (368,000), Dallas (344,000), Houston, (1,725,000) and Nashville (465,000).

The cities in the survey that are smaller than Baton Rouge are Albuquerque (342,000), Charlotte (324,000), Jackson, Miss. (204,000), Mobile (205,000) and Tucson, Ariz. (352,000).