

Hate crimes decline, but some groups targeted

Crimes fall to all-time lows in Orange County, but incidents against African Americans rise slightly, officials say.

SANTA ANA • Hate crimes have fallen for the fourth year in a row in Orange County, dropping to a low that has not been seen for at least eight years.



SALVADOR HERNANDEZ
 REGISTER WRITER

Fifty-six hate crimes were reported last year, according to the 2010 Hate Crime Report released

Thursday by the Orange County Human Relations Commission, compared with 77 reported in 2009.

The consistent drop is welcome news for the organization, which tracks the number of hate crimes and hate incidents in Orange County, but commission members and civil rights leaders expressed concern that some hate crimes might not get reported.

Not reporting incidents is a problem for gay, lesbian and transgender people, said Ginger Hahn, executive director of The Center, which provides support for gay, lesbian and transgender people. Reporting a hate crime in which someone was targeted can mean going public about his or her sexual orientation, and many people are not ready for that, she said.

Hate crimes are categorized as such when a criminal act is found to be motivated by a person's disability, gender, nationality, race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation. In criminal court, a hate crime is used as a sentencing enhancement, sim-

Hate crimes by year

2003: 76	2007: 82
2004: 99	2008: 79
2005: 96	2009: 77
2006: 101	2010: 56

2010 victims

- African Americans:** 18
- Multiple:** 8
- Muslim/Middle Eastern:** 8
- Gay/lesbian:** 5
- Latino:** 4
- Asian:** 3
- Christian:** 3
- Jewish:** 3

Source: O.C. Human Relations
 2010 Hate Crime Report

ilar to gang membership.

Of the 56 hate crimes reported in 2010, 22 were reported as destruction or vandalism, according to the report. Eighteen of the crimes were simple assaults.

"The good news is that hate crimes have been going down," said Nadia Bettendorf, chairwoman of the Human Relations Commission. "The bad news is there is one group that is suffering more than others."

The report, which the commission has released annually since 1991, showed hate crimes and incidents have decreased for nearly all groups. However, hate crimes against African Americans increased slightly. Despite being less than 2 percent of the Orange County population, African Americans were victimized 18 times – the victims of nearly one-third of all hate crimes reported.

"This is not part of school life; it is not something you need to accept," said Edward Thomas, director Christ our Redeemer Community Development.

Civil rights leaders said many incidents have been reported at schools, and stressed the importance of providing training to teachers and administrators in handling such issues, which can stem from prolonged bullying and develop into violence.

"If hate and bigotry can be taught, then understanding can be taught," said Kevin O'Grady, regional director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Hate incidents, also tracked by the commission, involve some sort of bias against a certain group, but are not considered crimes.

The report also noted a rise in hate incidents against Muslims in 2010, when 31 such incidents were reported.

Rusty Kennedy, executive director of the commission, said several of those incidents involved hateful emails and phone calls received by several members of UC Irvine's Muslim Student Union following the disruption of a speech being given by Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren at the university in February 2010.

Eleven students have since been charged with conspiring to disrupt the speech, and the case is pending.

CONTACT THE WRITER:
 949-454-7361 or
 shernandez@ocregister.com