

DISTRICT ATTORNEY

DISTRICT ATTORNEY
Larry D. Morse II

CHIEF DEPUTY
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
David Moranda



ASSISTANT
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
Joseph M. Tresidder

CHIEF DEPUTY
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
Harold L. Nutt

2222 "M" STREET, MERCED, CA 95340
TELEPHONE (AREA CODE 209) 385-7381
FAX (209) 385-7473

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Merced County District Attorney Larry D. Morse II would like to remind the citizens of Merced County that there is a tip line to report criminal activity.

Violence, and especially gang violence, has been a problem in Merced County for some time. There has been a recent surge in gang - related criminal activity, including several shootings. While our local law enforcement agencies are dedicated to making our community safe, there are fewer than 500 peace officers in this County and it is impossible to observe everything. The most effective tool against crime and criminals is more eyes and ears on the street, and every citizen can help. It is not uncommon to hear people say that they don't want to become involved, citing fear of retribution. One solution is to provide citizens with the opportunity to pass along information safely to law enforcement.

To report an anonymous tip by telephone, citizens may call 385-7383, extension 4245. This line will be answered from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., and an answering machine will answer after hours and on weekends. Please do not use the tip line in an emergency or if a crime is currently taking place; for those situations please dial 911.

The type of information that is critical for law enforcement includes the nature and location of the crime or potential criminal activity, the location of the crime or potential criminal activity, names and full or partial descriptions of persons who may be suspects or witnesses, including scars or tattoos, and descriptions of involved vehicles including license numbers. Callers may leave their names or numbers where they can be contacted, but it is never required.

In addition to the telephone tip line, an online "Tip Link" has been established. The "Tip Link" will also be used to gather information law enforcement needs to solve a crime or to prevent a crime from occurring. Many times citizens do not report information because they feel it may not be important. However, all information, either by itself or in combination with other reports, could be crucial. The website address for tips is <http://www.co.merced.ca.us/da> Click on the "District Attorney tip link" icon to make a report.