



Southern California - this just in

Hate crimes decrease again in Orange County

The number of reported hate crimes against blacks, Latinos and Jews in Orange County increased slightly last year, while the overall number of such crimes held relatively steady, officials said this week.

The annual Orange County Human Relations Commission report lists 79 reported hate crimes in 2008, compared with 80 the prior year. Vandalism and assault were the leading types of incidents, according to the report. There were 101 reported hate crimes in 2006.

“The good news is hate crimes are coming down in Orange County,” said commission Executive Director Rusty Kennedy. “The bad news is African Americans, Latinos and Jews this year all experienced increases.”

African Americans were targeted more than any other group, according to the report. There were 23 reported incidents in 2008. African Americans make up about 2% of the county’s population, according to the Census Bureau.

In addition, reported hate crimes involving Latino victims have more than doubled in the last six years, going from six incidents in 2003 to 15 last year. There were 10 reported crimes against Jews in 2008, compared with seven the prior year.

The number of incidents was primarily culled from reports to local law enforcement agencies, Kennedy said, adding that the number of hate-fueled incidents is probably undercounted because hate crimes aren't always reported and not all incidents rise to the level of crime.

Although there were two reported hate crimes targeting people perceived to be Muslims last year, an additional 10 reports of hate-fueled incidents -- like hateful publications and other forms of speech, were reported against the group.

The report “gives us an idea of some of the more egregious hate crimes,” Kennedy said. “It doesn’t tell us the entirety of the name calling that goes on and the quiet indignities people face that they don’t report to law enforcement.”

-- Paloma Esquivel