

Study: Crime risk near airports exceeds national average

By Gary Stoller, USA TODAY

July 12, 2011

The risk of becoming a crime victim is four times greater than the national average in areas outside most of the nation's big city airports, a new study by a crime-forecasting company reveals.



By Eileen Blass, USA TODAY

Trains go into and out of Philadelphia's 30th Street Station.

The exclusive study, done for USA TODAY by CAP Index, of Exton, Pa., shows that the likelihood of a crime exceeds the national average outside 28 of 29 airports in the most populous metropolitan regions of the country and all 26 central train stations studied.

"I travel all the time, and it's a wake-up call," says Jon Groussman, president and COO of CAP Index.

Thefts, assaults and robberies are the most common crimes in neighborhoods outside airports and central train stations, criminologist Rosemary Erickson says.

STORY: Risk of crime rises outside airports, stations

Airports and train stations may feel safe to travelers because of a greater presence of police and security people. However, travelers should be careful not to carry a false sense of security outside with them, criminologists warn.

"(Travelers) are relatively secure inside the airport boundaries," Groussman says. "But the immediate areas they're located in often have neighborhood characteristics that strongly correlate with increased crime potential."

Those areas are often poor neighborhoods, which have a higher likelihood of crime, says Lewis Yablonsky, emeritus professor of criminology at California State University-Northridge.

The area outside Philadelphia International Airport has the greatest crime risk of any area outside an airport in the 25 most populous metropolitan regions, the CAP Index study finds.

The lowest risk is outside Pittsburgh International, where the likelihood of crime is nearly half the national average.

In Houston, the risk is high outside George Bush International airport and the city's Amtrak station. The area outside the station on Washington Avenue has a higher crime risk than any other area near a big central train station, according to the CAP Index study.

Other train station neighborhoods with a very high crime risk: those outside Union Station in Los Angeles and Chicago, and Philadelphia's 30th Street Station. The area outside the central rail station on Vine Avenue in Riverside, Calif., has the lowest likelihood of crime of the big cities' studied, but it's still more than double the national average.

Areas around airports and train stations aren't necessarily the most dangerous areas of a city. Nor does a high risk of crime around transportation terminals mean an entire city has that same risk or that it's more dangerous than another city.

CAP Index says its crime-risk determinations are 70% to 90% accurate. Like other probability formulas, CAP Index's methodology has its limitations, company officials admit, because it does not take into account various variables, including police force size, amount of security equipment being used and current events.