

# OPERATION NO GANGS

[WWW.OPERATIONNOGANGS.ORG](http://WWW.OPERATIONNOGANGS.ORG)

## Operation No Gangs

[www.operationnogangs.org](http://www.operationnogangs.org) (915) 239-1997

**El Paso Gangs Step Up Activity** *Daniel Borunda* **El Paso Times** Sunday, February 5, 2006

The specialized El Paso police unit in charge of investigating gang violence had a January five times as busy as January last year, investigators said.

A recent spike in gang activity called out the police Drive-by Shooting Response Team to five cases in January, compared with one in January 2005, statistics showed. The unit had a total of 24 "call-outs" in 2005, and 25 in 2004.

Last October, Rob Gallardo, a gang prevention counselor with the OnRamp Youth Foundation of El Paso, predicted 2006 would see a rise in gang activity. "It will be a violent year," he warned, speaking of the emergence of a new generation of gangsters attempting to fill the void left by imprisoned or retired gang members.

"Every now and then, you have a spike in gang-related crime," said Sgt. Reginald Moton, who leads the El Paso Police Gang Unit. "We've been busy recently."

The increase has taken the form of two shootings, two stabbings and a beating outside a Whataburger that put a man in the hospital.

No one was killed. But that doesn't mean the violence wasn't destructive.

A stabbing last week at NorthPark Mall put 18-year-old Gabriela Hinojos in a whirlpool of worry. Her boyfriend is in jail accused in the stabbing. She faces charges of tampering with evidence in the case. She wonders whether she'll graduate from high school in May. And she fears for the safety of her and her baby daughter.

"I have a (19)-month-old baby. I can't be dealing with their dumb (gang) things," Hinojos said.

Hinojos and her boyfriend, Robert Gonzalez, also 18, have had ongoing problems with a street gang in the Northeast, she said. "My boyfriend has always tried to ignore them," she said.

Jan. 30, Hinojos said, she was walking home from Irvin High School when a gang member harassed and pushed her near the campus baseball field. "He started saying his little gang ... that (they) were going to rule," she said.

Gonzalez drove up to give Hinojos a ride, and she told him what had happened. Gonzalez then confronted

the teen at the nearby NorthPark Mall parking lot, where a fight began, she said. Hinojos said Gonzalez was fighting two guys when he stabbed Adrian Rivera, 17, with a small work knife in self-defense.

According to a police complaint affidavit, Rivera ran after being stabbed, but was caught by Gonzalez and his father, Hugo Gonzalez, 35, who held Rivera from behind while his son swung a knife at him. The affidavit only mentions Rivera was walking with “witnesses.” The clash was between members of rival gangs, police said.

Hugo and Robert Gonzalez remained jailed Saturday on charges of aggravated assault with a deadly weapon.

Hinojos and her friend Ana Mayra Porras, 17, face tampering- with-evidence charges for allegedly hiding the knife under a car seat when they were pulled over by police.

Usually, when a student faces criminal charges, he or she is sent to the school district’s alternative education program, an El Paso Independent School District spokeswoman said. Hinojos fears that this will jeopardize her and Porras’ chances to graduate.

“We are both seniors. We both stay out of trouble,” Hinojos said. “They are making us look like we are gangsters, but we are not.”

It has been frustrating dealing with the gang, suspected of breaking windows at their home, Hinojos said. “The cops never do nothing to them,” she said.

It was such a cycle of violence and retaliation that led to the creation of the Drive-by Shooting Response Team, or DSRT, in 1995 when El Paso was awash in gang activity. The team is credited in part for reducing the number of drive-by shootings from 288 in 1993 to only a handful a year.

“DSRT is called out any time there is a serious injury, serious property damage. Any time there is the potential for a gang-related situation to escalate,” Moton said.

The team, which is part of the Gang Unit, is made up of six investigators. Each El Paso police region also has its own tactical team, which works on gang enforcement, intelligence gathering and crime trends.

Last month, extra resources were added in the Northeast to deal with recent gang problems, police said.

El Paso has 472 active gangs, party crews, tagging crews and other groups that can be found in all parts of the city, police statistics showed.

And though January was busy, police hope they’ll see a repeat of 2004, which began with five call-outs in January, followed with a drop-off in activity the rest of the year. “It drops down, and you don’t hear about it,” Moton said.