July homicide drops but year-so-far tally up
By Jeremy Gorner
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Homicides fell in Chicago during July compared with a year earlier, the first monthly decline so far in 2012, which has seen murders spike by almost 27 percent.

July ended with 49 homicides, six fewer than in July 2011, an 11 percent drop, police statistics show.

Chicago has received national attention after homicides soared by more than 60 percent after a warm March. The numbers had continued to increase month-by-month since then but at a far slower pace.

Still, through July, 308 people have been killed, up 26.7 percent from 243 in the year-earlier period.

The drop in July numbers was driven largely by a sharp decrease in homicides in one of the city’s 23 police districts -- in the South Side’s Englewood district, which covers the crime-ridden Englewood and West Englewood neighborhoods.

Last month, the district saw only three homicides, down from 15 in July 2011.

Through July 2012, homicides in the Englewood district have fallen by 34 percent.

Mayor Rahm Emanuel has credited the move in January when Chicago police began to saturate hot spots with extra officers in the Englewood district as well as the Harrison police district, two areas of the city that accounted for much of the violent crime in 2011.

Yet the Harrison District, as well as the South Chicago District, led the city in July with eight homicides.

Much of the bloodshed in the Harrison District stemmed from several shootings in the first few days of the month in the West Garfield Park neighborhood. The district had three slayings in July 2011. So far this year, though, homicides have dropped 18 percent in the district.

Criminologists have cautioned into reading too much in crime statistics over short periods of time, noting their tendency to fluctuate.

“Perhaps the earliest months were anomalous and we are returning to our ‘typical’ levels,” said Arthur Lurigio, a professor of criminal justice and psychology at Loyola University Chicago.

A Chicago police department spokeswoman did not make Superintendent Garry McCarthy available on Wednesday to talk about the July statistics.