Shootings up 49% in November

By Jeremy Gorner
December 4, 2012

Thelma Smith was visiting her mother's South Side home Friday night to talk about a birthday party in memory of her son, Samuel Clay, 25, who was shot and killed in April.

After several shots rang out on the next block, Smith rushed over and discovered to her horror that another son, William Lee Martin, 30, had been slain.

The father of six became the latest sad statistic as a violent November came to an end. Shootings jumped to 192 for the month, up 49 percent from 129 a year earlier, according to Police Department records.

That meant shootings were up more than 11 percent in the first 11 months of 2012 compared with a year earlier. Through October, shootings had risen about 8 1/2 percent.

And four fatal shootings on Friday alone pushed the homicide total for the month to 38, just above 37 in November 2011. For the first 11 months of 2012, homicides have risen to 480, a 21 percent increase from 398 a year earlier. If trends continue, Chicago will likely exceed 500 homicides for the first time since 2008.

The violence has earned Chicago unflattering national attention since the first three months of the year, when homicides skyrocketed amid unseasonably warm weather. The rate of increase has eased since then.

Robert Tracy, chief of the department's crime-control strategies, noted that the same trend has occurred with shootings after spiking by 40 percent in the early part of the year. He credited the department's use of "gang audits" — in which specialized units share gang intelligence with beat officers — and other strategies with helping bring that percentage down.

"I think we've done a very good job with that," Tracy said. "(But) any murder or any shooting is unacceptable."

As for the sharp rise in shootings in November, criminologists said that could merely be part of the random ebb and flow of crime statistics. Still, the increase is worth noting, said Arthur Lurigio, a professor of criminal justice and psychology at Loyola University Chicago.

"Last year's total was markedly low, so we would expect an uptick this year simply because statistics fluctuate in the direction in which they have more room to move," he said. "However, this is a substantial increase from one year to the next."
About 20 of last month's shootings took place in the department's Deering District, which includes the Back of the Yards and Fuller Park neighborhoods.

Among the victims was Martin, who was killed Friday when gunfire went through the window of a Fuller Park home in the 4200 block of South Wells Street and struck him in the head. Three others were wounded in the shooting. Just minutes earlier, two people were hurt in a separate shooting about a mile away.

Police acknowledged that Martin's homicide happened in an area where two street gangs have been feuding lately. No arrests had been made as of Monday evening.

Smith and other relatives planned to celebrate what would have been the 26th birthday of her other slain son on Dec. 12, but now that money will have to go to pay for Martin's funeral, she said.

"I just buried my youngest son ... and eight months later, I'm going to have to bury another one," Smith, 48, said Friday night through tears. "I don't know what this world is coming to, you know, with all this shooting."