Cincinnati Police are preparing for a major crackdown on gangs and groups involved in criminal activity in the city.

The effort is in response to 16 murders in Cincinnati so far this year, according to Greg Baker, Executive Manager of Relations for the police department.

Eleven of those have occurred in March with six taking place the past week -- two in The Over-The-Rhine and one each in North Fairmount, South Cumminsville, Avondale and College Hill.

"We can’t go through the rest of the year like this," said Baker.

An analysis of the 11 homicides shows that three were related to domestic violence, but the remainder showed similar patterns.

One is that they’re seasonal, according to Baker – occurring at the time of year when the weather gets warm and the homicide rate tends to go up.

He said the other is the fact that people involved in the shootings are already involved in criminal activity.

"Either the victim or the suspect participates in groups or gangs, hangs out with cliques, crews, clubs or is a member of a group or a gang," Baker stated.

Baker said that half-a-dozen gangs are being targeted to send a message that the City of Cincinnati is not going to tolerate homicides and criminal acts.

"We’re going to see the culmination of some long-term criminal investigations in the next couple of weeks," he said.

It will be similar to the 96 count indictment brought against members of the Taliband gang in Northside a few years ago.

Also, extra attention will be paid to high crime areas such as The Over-The-Rhine, West End, Avondale and English woods.

Law enforcement is just one part of CIRV – the Cincinnati Initiative To Reduce Violence. The others are social services and community members. Both will be empowered to play major crime-fighting roles.

Police are partnering with Operation Cease Fire in Avondale along with faith-based groups in other neighborhoods. Anti-violence rallies are planned for many areas.

Downtown, CIRV street advocates will step up their efforts.

They met Friday at their offices in The Over-The-Rhine to map out their role in trying to stop the violence and killings.

CIRV Coordinator Stan Ross said the advocates have been successful in getting out the message that
there is hope, options and another way besides crime.

"You have to change peoples’ behavior," he said. "You see how people are behaving and then you find out where that stuff is coming from."

It might be a person’s environment, perceived injustice or a crack in the family foundation, according to Ross. That’s when the real work begins, starting with asking permission of a person to help them.

"In order to be a man, you have to see a man, but what does that look like," Ross said. "I know that males make babies, mannequins look like babies, but men raise babies. How do you become a man? It’s a process."

One trend that bothers Ross is the fact that more children are turning to crime at a younger age. He cited one of The Over-The-Rhine shootings where the suspect reportedly was 13-years-old.

Ross then wondered out loud whether the teenager was paid to pull the trigger by an adult who knew that federal gun charges would be filed against him if he was caught.

Working with 13 to 17 year olds will be another item added to the "to-do" list of the street advocates.

"One of the solutions for them is real mentoring," said Ross, while noting that more volunteers are needed – especially with summer not that far away.

"My plea is we need your help," Ross said. "We need your help no matter what background you come from, no matter what age you are. We need your help and that is to help someone else have a better life."

If you volunteer as a mentor call 513-721-0595.

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