



Warren C. Evans
Sheriff

News Release

www.waynecounty.com/sheriff

Release Date: October 22, 2007

Contact: Ofc. John Roach, 313-224-0615

Operation "Wrecker Checker" busts tow truck drivers hauling stolen cars to scrap yard

◆ **Wayne County Auto Theft ACTION Team and Secretary of State launch new effort**

Wayne County's East Side ACTION (Arresting Car Thieves In Our Neighborhood) Team, along with the Michigan Secretary of State's Office, and National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) has launched a new program that targets fly-by-night tow truck, or wrecker, companies as they bring stolen vehicles to local scrap yards to collect up to \$300 per vehicle, Sheriff Warren C. Evans announced today.



Operation Wrecker Checker got underway last week when ACTION officers from the Sheriff's Office, Grosse Pointe Park Department of Public Safety, City of Grosse Pointe Police Department and Harper Woods Police Department sealed off an area around the Fritz Enterprise salvage yard on W. Chicago near Livernois in Detroit. Using a cross-jurisdictional task force approach, the ACTION Team, which focuses mostly on the county's east side, received information that led investigators to the Fritz location on the city's west side.

Within the first hour, officers had arrested three tow truck drivers, each of which was hauling a vehicle that had been reported stolen, but not properly recovered by its owner or a police agency. Two of those arrested were Glenn Davis and Elma Howard of Detroit, both of whom operate as independent tow truck drivers using modified pickup trucks retrofitted with towing arms and hooks.

"When most people think of car thieves, they probably think of a guy with a screwdriver and slim jim wearing a hooded sweatshirt, not someone driving a supposedly legitimate tow truck," Evans said. "However, we have come to learn that the problem is widespread, even epidemic, in this area."

#more#

Customer traffic flowing into the yard slowed considerably after the first hour, leading Evans to believe that the police attention had scared away other tow truck drivers pulling stolen vehicles. Evans said the ACTION team also is investigating whether the operators of the yard may be knowingly receiving stolen vehicles.

Grosse Pointe Park Police Chief David Hiller said that in addition to the three tow truck drivers arrested at the scene, officers made another discovery several streets away.

“One of the officers on the scene actually discovered a vehicle attached to an abandoned tow truck two blocks away from the scrap yard,” said Grosse Pointe Park Police Chief David Hiller. “It appears that the driver simply abandoned his own vehicle, possibly to avoid being arrested like the others. The vehicle attached to the truck was not reported stolen, so we think the driver, who we are still attempting to identify, may have had a warrant for his arrest or no valid driver’s license.”

Evan said the tow truck issue causes several problems, including higher auto theft statistics, fewer recovered stolen vehicles and, ultimately, higher auto insurance rates.

“Our ultimate goal is to reduce auto theft enough to make a compelling case to insurance companies to lower their rates, particularly in Detroit,” Evans said. “We want people to know that we have only just begun this type of enforcement and will be doing more in the near future.”

Each suspect faces up to five years in prison for receiving and concealing a stolen motor vehicle, although Davis and Howard face additional time as habitual offenders.