



PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: May 25, 2010
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Police Arrest Several in Metal Theft Ring Investigation

RIVERSIDE, CA — The Riverside Police Department recently formed a special unit of officers and detectives from each Neighborhood Policing Center to combat the trend of metal thefts within the City. Their mission is to identify and arrest those individuals involved in the theft and resale of metal such as irrigation backflow valves and other metal.

The specialized unit is utilizing a variety of covert and overt methods to impact the national trend of metal thefts and resale. These tactics include deploying and monitoring dummy backflow valves set at parks and landscaped areas, installing alarms and cameras at locations that have been repeatedly victimized, and conducting late night and early morning surveillances and sting operations along with compliance checks of scrap yards to ensure compliance with the laws that regulate them.

Since the formation of the unit, several arrests have been made for crimes ranging from catching thieves in possession of stolen metal backflow valves to catching thieves immediately after stealing metal backflow valves. Investigators also gathered information about a metal scrap yard that was illegally accepting stolen backflow valves for cash.

On Tuesday, May 25, 2010, detectives and officers from the Riverside Police Department conducted an undercover operation at the AAA Metal Recycling Center located at 5490 26th Street in the City of Rubidoux. Part of the operation consisted of undercover officers offering the recycling center staff several marked for ownership backflow valves for recycling. The staff immediately purchased the backflow valves with cash and did not inquire about their ownership or the identity of the undercover officers. The recycling staff immediately transferred the backflow valves to an area where they were to be cut into small, untraceable pieces. This transaction was in violation of state law which requires the recycling center to obtain a thumb print, photo identification, and a photo of the items brought to recycle. State law also prohibits payment until three days after the transaction.

Upon further inspection, detectives and officers recovered over four hundred pounds of chopped-up suspected stolen metal backflow valves from a bin at the location. The replacement value of these backflow valves is approximately \$15,000.00.

To date, six suspects have been arrested for backflow valve thefts, accepting stolen backflow valves and violation of state laws pertaining to operating a metal recycling center.

As a result of this undercover investigation, three employees of AAA Recycling Center were arrested and charged with possession of stolen property. They have been identified as Reyes JELASCO, 28, of Rubidoux; Manuel De Jesus VELASCO, age 30, of Rubidoux and John CABRAL, age 48, of Bloomington. The owner of the AAA Recycling Center, Cynthia Rosario RAMIREZ, 33, of Rubidoux was arrested for a number of misdemeanor violations pertaining to the operation of the recycling center.

Our Field Operations Patrol Division is also involved in the prevention of these thefts and apprehension of those involved in these crimes. On May 16, 2010, Shawn CATHCART, age 22, of Riverside was arrested and charged with grand theft minutes after he was stopped by officers and investigators after stealing a backflow valve from a local golf course. Others who have been involved in the theft of backflow valves have been arrested for other crimes.

Backflow valves are devices made of copper or brass, typically mounted above ground and are used to irrigate landscape while preventing contamination to a resident's domestic water source. A typical two-inch backflow valve is valued at approximately \$500.00. Costs to an owner replacing a stolen valve typically exceed \$1,000.00.

The theft of backflow valves and other metals is a national trend that is influenced by the downturn in the economy. Thieves typically steal the metal for its scrap value or resale on the black market. However, there are measures that citizens and businesses can take to reduce the likelihood of being a victim of these thefts:

- Enclose your backflow valve in a metal cage that is securely fastened to the ground and lock the cage with a quality lock.
- Position your backflow valve behind your perimeter fence if you have one so that it is not easily accessed.
- Paint your backflow valve with bright colored paint or conceal it by planting brush around it and paint it green.
- Post a sign stating something similar to: "Theft and damage to this unit will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."
- Stamp, label, etch or otherwise mark the metal with a recognizable code or name of your choosing to make it less desirable to legitimate recyclers.
- Place a surveillance camera or even a dummy camera in the area to deter a theft.
- Be active in your Neighborhood Watch or Business Watch programs and report suspicious activity to police.

- Check with your local utility or public works department before implementing any of the listed suggestions.

Anyone with information related to thefts of metal or metal backflow valves is asked to report this information to Detective Melissa Brazil of the Riverside Police Department East NPC Investigations at 951-351-6249 or by calling the Riverside Police Department's Dispatch center at 951-787-7911. Callers can remain anonymous.

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