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# Undercover Auto Theft Operation Nets 51 for Selling Stolen Cars, Drugs

## *Task Force Partners with Military for Six-Month Crackdown*

San Diego County District Attorney [Bonnie M. Dumanis](#) today announced a six-month undercover operation conducted by the Regional Auto Theft Task Force ([RATT](#)), in cooperation with the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), has resulted in grand jury indictments of 51 defendants. Charges include auto theft, selling stolen vehicles, sale of controlled substances, carjacking, residential burglary and identity theft. As part of “Operation Hotel California,” undercover officers purchased stolen cars, drugs and weapons at an undercover location in San Diego.

“San Diego County ranks fourth in the nation for auto theft, which is why the ongoing work by this task force is so important,” said DA Dumanis. “In this case, dozens of car thieves have been shut down thanks to extraordinary cooperation between RATT and NCIS.”

“Operation Hotel California” was launched in July 2009, in part, as a response to community concern over increased auto theft. In the course of investigating the auto theft and narcotics crimes, law enforcement officers from RATT solved carjackings, illegal distribution of firearms, a residential burglary and identity theft cases.

For the first time, RATT joined forces with NCIS, which contributed funding and personnel to the operation. “After reports that car thieves were targeting areas in and around military housing, NCIS felt it was important to get involved,” said San Diego NCIS Special Agent-in-Charge Jeffrey Morrow. “The operation was carried out near Navy housing in an effort to reduce crime in areas where Navy personnel and their families live and work.”

Evidence seized during the operation includes 46 stolen cars, seven guns and two ballistic vests. While auto thieves were the primary target, drugs purchased as part of the operation included cocaine, methamphetamine, ecstasy, Oxycontin and heroin.

“Taking a pro-active approach in seeking out the professional auto thief and having aggressive prosecution has had a definite impact within our community” said RATT Commander, CHP Captain Lisa Wrobel.

(More)

In 2005, 27,767 vehicles were stolen in San Diego County. By 2008, that number dropped 21% to 21,863. From January through August of 2009, statistics reflect a continued decline with 10,358 vehicles stolen. The projected theft rate for 2009 is less than 16,000 vehicles, reducing auto theft by more than 40% during the past four years.

The mission of San Diego County's Regional Auto Theft Task Force (RATT) is to collaborate effectively to reduce the incidence of vehicle and cargo theft and increase the arrests and prosecution of professional thieves using regional pro-active investigative methods and public education. The task force is led by the California Highway Patrol and members include the San Diego County District Attorney's Office; San Diego County Sheriff's Department; the FBI; the police departments in Chula Vista, Carlsbad, Coronado, El Cajon, Escondido, La Mesa and Oceanside; California Department of Insurance; National Insurance Crime Bureau; and the San Diego County Probation Department.

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