

November 16, 2017
For Immediate Release

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60 Indicted in Undercover Auto Theft Operation; Officers Bought Stolen Cars

RATT Task Force Partnered with HSI, NCIS for 8-Month Crackdown

San Diego County District Attorney [Summer Stephan](#) today announced that dozens of defendants have been indicted as a result of ‘Operation Kill Switch,’ conducted by the San Diego County Regional Auto Theft Task Force (RATT). Beginning in February and ending in September, undercover officers purchased stolen vehicles, narcotics, body armor and firearms from more than 90 individuals. A San Diego County Grand Jury was presented with evidence of the undercover purchases and returned indictments on 60 individuals. The defendants, some of whom worked as organized crime rings, face various felony charges vehicle theft, residential burglary, possession of stolen property and illegal weapons possession.

“Dozens of car thieves have been shut down as a result of this operation, thanks to the excellent work done by RATT and its law enforcement partners,” said District Attorney Summer Stephan. “We’ve seen vehicle thefts start to go back up in recent years, so staying vigilant and supporting RATT’s mission is an important component of keeping San Diego one of the safest urban counties in the nation.”

During Operation Kill Switch, more than 70 vehicles were recovered by law enforcement, with a total estimated value of \$1.1 million dollars. Several luxury cars that had been stolen were purchased by undercover detectives, among them were vehicles manufactured by Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Audi, Cadillac, and a Tesla. Several U-Haul trucks were also recovered. Vehicles recovered had been stolen from across San Diego County, as well as Los Angeles, Orange, and Riverside Counties.

“In yet another collaborative effort, Investigators from RATT, NCIS and HSI have made a significant impact in the reduction of auto theft throughout San Diego County. I am proud of the work that was done by our investigators and know these types of operations go a long way in protecting our communities.” said RATT Commander Don Goodbrand.

“We increasingly see organized crime rings involved in everything from auto theft and drug trafficking to firearms and insurance fraud. Our task force approach has proven successful and we applaud the team’s work to shut down this ring,” said Insurance Commissioner Dave Jones.

In addition to the detectives assigned to the Regional Auto Theft Task Force (RATT), Operation Kill Switch also involved Special Agents from the Naval Criminal Investigative Service and the Department of Homeland Security Investigations.

Law enforcement made arrests yesterday (November 15) during an early-morning sweep across San Diego County. Suspects in this investigation face varied sentences depending on their criminal background including probation to 10 years in prison.

According to CHP statistics, last year 12,207 vehicles were stolen in San Diego County, a 13% increase from the year before. From January to September 2017, 7,913 vehicles were reported stolen. Statistics show an increase in vehicle theft for two years in a row, after a drop in 2013 and 2014.

Reported vehicle thefts by year for San Diego County:

- 2013: 12,200 (down 7.5 % from 13,188)
- 2014: 10,383 (down 14.9 % from 12,200)
- 2015: 10,668 (up 2.74 % from 10,383)
- 2016: 12,207 (up 12.81 % from 10,668)

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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, La Mesa and Oceanside; California Department of Insurance; National Insurance Crime Bureau; and the San Diego County Probation Department.