

Undercover Deputies Take Aim at Illegal Sales on Light-Rail Trains

(April 4) Undercover teams of Sheriff's deputies working the Metro Blue Line and Metro Green Line over the past month have significantly reduced illegal sales of jewelry, batteries, candy and other solicitations on board the trains.

Passengers had complained of being annoyed by aggressive solicitors working the trains. Some also said they were cheated when the "fresh" batteries they bought were dead used batteries.

"I was solicited by a guy selling what he said was 14 carat gold jewelry," says Sheriff's Sgt. Cory Fletcher, who coordinated the undercover effort to stop the on-board sales. "Of course, it wasn't gold."

Eventually, Fletcher traced much of the sales effort to a group of ex-drug addicts who live at a downtown halfway house operated by a local ministry. The house manager agreed to warn his tenants that it is illegal to solicit sales on MTA property or trains.

'No tolerance' directive

The ministry's program director also agreed to re-enforce the Sheriff's Department's "no tolerance" directive with the halfway house residents.

Since the beginning of January, Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau undercover deputies have arrested 10 suspects and issued 122 citations to 14 juveniles and 98 adults for "quality of life" violations, including selling, eating, drinking and causing disturbances aboard the trains.

"The passengers who regularly ride the system and those who would take advantage of our passengers have been put on notice that the MTA and the Sheriff's Department have zero tolerance for this kind of activity," said Lt. David Tellez. "We'll continue to enforce these quality of life issues on a regular basis."

The LAPD, meanwhile, has received no passenger complaints about unauthorized sales aboard Metro Red Line trains, according to Lt. Anthony LoMedico of the Transit Group's rail division.

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