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Targeting Taggers in the San Fernando Valley

- Officers make 32 arrests
in early-morning raid

By Eric Rapp

(Jan 20, 2005) One hundred fifty officers from six different law enforcement agencies fanned out across the San Fernando Valley, Jan. 17, with only one mission: Make sure taggers who had defaced Metro buses, trains, and property wouldn't commit their crimes again.

Organized by Sheriff's deputies Stephan Schneider and Jose De La Cruz of the Transit Services Bureau's Chatsworth substation, the probation sweep included TSB deputies and officers from the Los Angeles Police Department, the California Highway Patrol, LA County Probation Department and the Union Pacific Railroad Police.

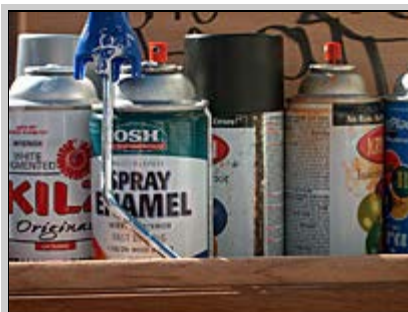
When accepting probation for their initial crime of vandalism of Metro property, the taggers gave police the right to search their home at any time until their probation was over.

On Monday, that bill came due, as the officers searched more than 71 locations throughout the San Fernando Valley for potential violations.

PHOTOS BY ERIC RAPP



Probation sweep team enters residence of suspected tagger in an apartment complex in the San Fernando Valley.



Tools of the Trade



Many probationers were “clean,” without any violations of their probation. But law enforcement officials discovered a number of others who were not living up to the terms set by a judge and had gone back to their criminal ways.

Officers made 32 arrests, confiscated eight guns, and seized liquor and several forms of narcotics, including methamphetamines and nearly two and a half pounds of marijuana. They also confiscated many “tools of the trade” of graffiti vandals, such as spray paint, markers, and etching tools.



Taking a break during the morning-long tagger raid are, from left, Sheriff's deputies Leonardo Castro, Scott Short, Tomas Rodriguez, Jessie Villanueva, Michael Ballai and Mano Lawsin.

In addition, officers were able to finally identify two prolific taggers whose “moniker” – their unique tag – was well known to Sheriff's Deputies, but not yet linked to a particular person.

“An effort of this kind really shows how widespread the problem is, and how tagging affects the entire community,” said Richard Hunt, General Manager of Metro San Fernando Valley. “It costs not just MTA, but the public at large. Bringing together the entire community to focus on a solution to the problem will benefit all of us.”

Metro Police Chief Capt. Dan Finkelstein commented that "tagging is a quality of life issue. Virtually none of our riders want to see graffiti and its presence suggests that an atmosphere of lawlessness exists on the Metro system. Crime stats have continually shown that riding on Metro is very safe."

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