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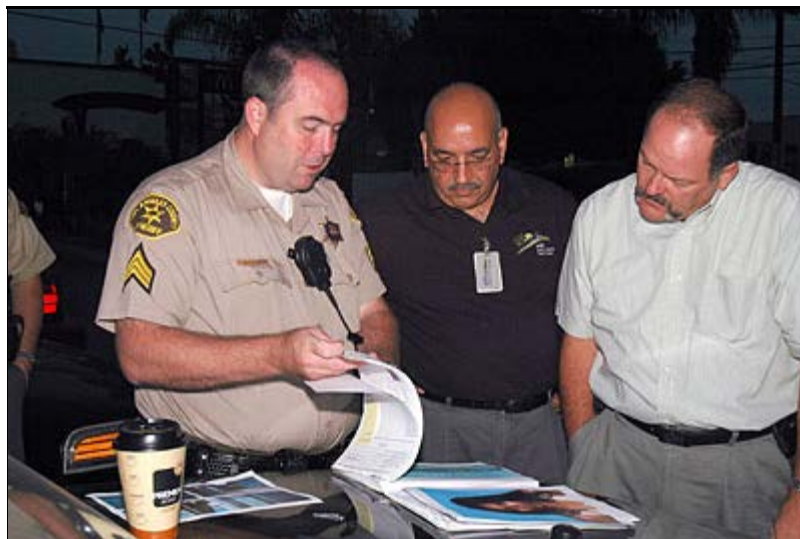


Photo by Ned Racine

Sheriff's Sgt. Chris Meadows, who led the Aug. 28 anti-tagging sweep, shows Duane Martin, director of Rail Transportation Operations, and Hector Moreno, assistant manager of Rail Division Transportation, photos of a tagger's vandalism before the serving of a warrant in Hollywood.

Transit Services Bureau Deputies Test New Strategy in Sweep for Taggers

- Sweep leads to arrest of 11 tagging suspects

By NED RACINE, Editor

(Sept. 4, 2008) Employing a new strategy to battle the vandalism of Metro vehicles, officers from the Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau (TSB) conducted a sweep against the UPN tagging crew, arresting 11 tagging suspects on Thursday, August 28.

According to Sheriff's Sgt. Chris Meadows, who led the sweep, the idea was to target the suspected members of a single tagging crew, in this case, UPN (Ur Property Next or Under Pigs' Noses).

"I think this is the first time [so] many members of a crew have been arrested at one time," said Meadows, who added that arrests were made in residences in Hollywood, South Los Angeles and Carson, as well as Orange and Riverside counties.

The sweep employed 70 officers, 30 of those TSB investigators, to serve warrants or conduct probation searches on 13 residences. Meadows estimated that the warrants covered approximately \$200,000 in newly documented damage and \$500,000 in previously documented damage to Metro vehicles and property.

The Aug. 28
sweep collected



a variety of tagging tools.

LASD photo

Sweep reaches convicted taggers

Convicted taggers at the California State Prison in Lancaster and Sierra Conservation Center had their cells searched as part of the sweep. Meadows said this was to demonstrate that even convicted UPN taggers would be pursued.

For a high-risk tagging suspect, the Sheriff's Special Enforcement Bureau (equivalent to a SWAT team) took part in serving a warrant.

Duane Martin, director of Rail Transportation Operations, and Hector Moreno, assistant manager of Rail Division Transportation, attended the serving of a warrant and arrest in Hollywood.

Although Martin said he knew in theory how the TSB conducted its anti-tagging efforts, he found it valuable to see the process in action. He found it "a shame, when you look at the resources pulled" from policing the Metro System to address vandalism.

Moreno was there to report back to his rail operators the end result of their anti-vandalism efforts. Moreno asks operators to check out their vehicles before they roll out and before they leave each terminus.



A palm tree outside one suspect's apartment house was tagged with the UPN initials.

Photo by Ned Racine

Moreno sees follow-through

"There's follow-through, and finally you get a [tagger] off the street," he plans to tell the rail operators.

Meadows, who was recently assigned to TSB's anti-tagging campaign, visited bus divisions 5, 6 and 7 during their graveyard shift to see for himself the damage done to the coaches.

"It was interesting seeing the same name come up over and over again," he said, noting that the UPN crew has hit every bus and rail division. "It's almost impossible to document all the damage," Meadows added, because some Metro vehicles are always in service.

What is particularly helpful, Meadows stressed, is when bus or rail operators immediately report to the Bus or Rail Operations Center when they have found new graffiti. Knowing a specific time-frame, for example, investigators have an easier search for digital evidence from the rail vehicle cameras. It also allows them to

photograph the damage before it's repaired.

Operator information on new graffiti also helps investigators separate evidence of new vandalism from existing vandalism, particularly important when charging a tagger, according to Meadows.

And although he admits that finding a tagger in the act is difficult for investigators, they do receive benefits from checking passengers for valid fares. Meadows said it is common to arrest a person for fare evasion and discover evidence of tagging.

Serving warrants brings notoriety to taggers

Meadows sees great value in the serving of warrants on residences. "Basically, it ties them to where they live and brings notoriety to their actions at home," he said. "It brings the taggers' crimes to the attention of their parents."

During the Aug. 28 sweep, Meadows said several suspects receiving warrants had never been arrested, although the majority of warrants were for taggers already on probation.

One tagger, whose moniker was "47er" was charged with causing \$78,000 in damage to Metro property. Charged with felony vandalism, "47er" was also charged with possession of a stolen firearm.

A 20-year-old nursing school student who lives in Hollywood was charged with damaging Metro vehicles from two divisions. The woman, whose moniker was "DOTS" or "DOTZ," had been arrested for vandalism twice before, the last time in March.

Sheriff's investigators believe DOTS has etched bus windows at West Hollywood Division 7 and slap-tagged buses at Arthur Winston Division 5.

In a symbol of vandalism's collateral damage, DOTS' mother waited outside her apartment—handcuffed, crying and speaking to herself in Spanish—while deputies searched her home for evidence of her daughter's new crimes.