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Inspector General Riviezzo, District Attorney Soares, and DMV Commissioner Naples Say Arrests Break Vehicle Inspection Sticker Theft Ring

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New York State Inspector General Dineen Riviezzo, Albany County District Attorney David Soares, and New York State Department of Motor Vehicles Commissioner Nancy Naples today announced the arrest of three individuals that broke a ring responsible for the theft of as many as 13,000 New York State vehicle inspection stickers, which were sold on the street for as much as \$100 each to persons whose vehicles could not pass legitimate inspections.

Arrested were Michael A. Jones, 47, of Albany, a 23-year employee of the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles; Danyeale T. Bueford, 26, of Troy, a temporary services worker with DMV; and Spencer R. Howell, 25, of Troy. All three were charged with Grand Larceny in the Third Degree, a D felony.

The DMV initiated an investigation in March 2005 after DMV Investigators, the Albany Police Department, Troy Police Department and other local law enforcement agencies had arrested a number of persons who were in possession of the illegally obtained stickers. The State Inspector's Office, the State Police and U.S. Postal Inspectors joined the investigation in April 2005 after investigators began questioning the source of the stickers. Between March 2005 and January 2006, more than 40 local motorists were arrested for possession of these stolen stickers. The matter was subsequently referred to the Albany District Attorney's Office, which participated in further investigative and prosecutorial efforts.

The charges filed in Albany City Court allege that Jones and Bueford, both of whom were assigned to the Mail Inserting Unit at DMV's Swan Street, Albany office, worked in concert to divert pre-addressed, sealed packages containing books of inspection stickers between the point the packages were put through a postage meter and their placement on U.S. Postal Service trucks for distribution to vehicle inspection stations throughout the state.

According to District Attorney Soares and Inspector General Riviezzo, the books, each containing 20-40 stickers, were then passed to Howell and unidentified other

persons outside DMV. The stickers ultimately were sold to drivers who wished to obtain a sticker without incurring the cost or time required to repair their vehicles so they could pass authorized inspections. Investigators obtained evidence indicating that motorists and others paid between \$30 and \$100 per stolen sticker. It is alleged that Jones, Bueford, Howell and unidentified others shared these illegal proceeds.

Investigators estimated that as many as 13,000 stickers were stolen and illegally distributed in this scheme between April 2005 and the present. The stolen stickers represent about \$75,000 in lost revenue to DMV. Motorists pay \$23 for an authorized inspection and sticker, \$6 of which DMV receives. Investigators recovered approximately 900 of the stolen stickers during the investigation.

State Inspector General Riviezzo said, "This case clearly shows there are serious consequences when public employees violate the trust we place in them. Stolen vehicle inspection stickers can be a tool for car thieves to evade detection. They can also be used by unscrupulous drivers to keep their uninspected and possibly unsafe vehicles on our streets and highways. Further, New York State and licensed inspection providers were cheated out of revenue due them."

Commissioner of the State Department of Motor Vehicles Nancy Naples said, "The arrest of these individuals signifies the DMV's strong stance against fraudulent activity and sends the message that the DMV will not tolerate deceptive actions. The discovery of the problem early on reflects that our procedures work. With these arrests, we can now implement mailroom security enhancements. Moreover, with the implementation of the DMV's electronic registration denial based enforcement, vehicles without an electronic record of inspection will be denied their registration renewal. Officer Frank Gallo of the Albany Police Department and all participants in this effort are to be commended and I am confident that these unscrupulous individuals will be brought to justice."

District Attorney Soares said, "The safety of our residents in Albany County and greater New York State were threatened by unsafe, uninspected vehicles. These individuals introduced a new medium of currency on the streets and seized the opportunity to make a profit while putting the lives of many in danger. It is important to note that this case would not have been possible without the work of the New York Inspector General's Office, the Department of Motor Vehicles, and the Troy and Albany Police Departments"

Since the initial questioning of the source of the stolen inspection stickers, the DMV has implemented additional procedures to prohibit this type of activity from future occurrences. Currently, the Department is working with the Postal Service to finalize changes to its mailing process that will allow for better package tracking. Starting this July, the Department will also implement registration based denial enforcement, which will allow for electronic tracking of inspection records and prevent drivers with stolen stickers from renewing their registrations.

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