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SFPD Law Enforcement Announces Results of "Operation Wrecking Ball" 18-171

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Multi-Agency Task Force Created to Disrupt & Dismantle Retail Theft & Fencing

The San Francisco Police Department, San Francisco District Attorney's Office, California Highway Patrol Golden Gate Division and San Francisco Sheriff's Department today announced the results of "Operation Wrecking Ball," an eight month-long investigation that culminated in a dozen arrests and the identification of stolen retail items valued at \$750,000.

"Retail theft is not a victimless crime," said San Francisco Police Chief William Scott. "Big and small businesses are hit hard financially by these thefts, which often endanger employees and discourage law-abiding customers. SFPD is collaborating closely with local businesses and our partner agencies to deter and investigate these crimes to make our City even safer and enable businesses to prosper."

Operation Wrecking Ball was organized in April 2018 following meetings between law enforcement officials and downtown San Francisco retailers victimized by thefts. With the establishment of a task force, officers representing allied law enforcement agencies began conducting investigations and undercover surveillance related to the theft and fencing of stolen retail items. Investigators learned property stolen in San Francisco was also being fenced in regions outside the Bay Area, including Texas, Seattle and Los Angeles.

"By dismantling major fencing operations we can cripple the demand for stolen property," said District Attorney George Gascón. "We have to keep the pressure up on street level theft, but it's operations like this that eliminate a market that enables thieves to thrive."

On December 5th, about 80 law enforcement officers conducted seven search warrants in San Francisco and one in Daly City. Investigators identified \$750,000 in stolen property, \$300,000 of which has been seized, including \$16,000 dollars in cash and 46 cellphones. Twelve people were arrested.

"Operation Wrecking Ball's successful execution depended upon local law enforcement agencies working collaboratively," said San Francisco Sheriff Vicki Hennessy. "The Sheriff's Department identified those individuals who had active warrants from a list of retail crime suspects. We assisted our law enforcement partners with executing the arrest warrants, recovering stolen goods during the execution of those search warrants and arresting the identified suspects. There's great public value when law enforcement works together."

California Governor Jerry Brown and the California Highway Patrol also played a large role by recognizing the significant problem California has with retail theft and the fencing of stolen items. Governor Brown and the CHP generously allocated resources to enable the retail task force build this operation.

“The CHP is proud to partner with local law enforcement agencies to combat organized retail theft,” said Commander of CHP Golden Gate Division Chief Ernie Sanchez. We will use the successes of this task force as a template in 2019 for other statewide operations. California Assembly Bill 1065, signed in September of 2018, has been specifically designed to combat retail theft occurring throughout the state of California. We look forward to harnessing the strength of our law enforcement partnerships, under the tenets of AB 1065, to better serve our communities throughout California.”

This is an ongoing investigation. Officers have identified and are seeking an additional 28 fugitives with arrest warrants for theft in San Francisco. The members of this task force want to thank Bay Area retailers who worked closely with law enforcement to help enable the success of this operation.

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