



Fresno County Sheriff - Coroner's Office Margaret Mims, Sheriff - Coroner

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News Release

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FSO Ag Task Force Detectives Uncover a Near \$1 Million Bee Theft Operation

On April 28, 2017, detectives with the Fresno County Sheriff's Ag Task Force began an investigation into the theft of bee hives. FSO Detectives and deputies with the Madera County Sheriff's Office went to an orchard near the intersection of E. Central Ave. and S. Temperance Ave. in Fresno and discovered more than 100 hives, which had been reported stolen from Madera County. While on the property, detectives saw person in a protective suit who was tending to the hives. The man, later identified as 51 year old Pavel Tveretinov, was arrested by Madera County Sheriff's detectives on a felony charge of possession of stolen property. The Sacramento man was booked into the Madera County Jail with a bail of \$10,000. He later posted the necessary bond and was released from jail.

The recovered hives belonged to Buzz Beekeeping of Springfield, Missouri. The company, like many other out-of-state beekeepers, contract with California growers to help with the pollination of their crops. Almond trees are most popular for this service in the Central Valley.

As FSO detectives continued their investigation, they found stolen bee hives at two other locations in Fresno County. So far, they have recovered approximately 2,500 stolen hives, which have a total value of \$875,000. It is believed Tveretinov is responsible for stealing these hives during the last three years from various parts of California. He would then redistribute them to different places in California, as well as other states, and collect money for the rental of the hives.

Detectives have contacted several owners of the hives and made arrangements to return them. One victim traveled in from Montana to collect his bee boxes. This remains an ongoing investigation and detectives continue to work to identify other victims and return their property to them.

Detectives have learned through previous investigations that suspects generally have knowledge of the industry and may have even worked as beekeepers in the past. Since there is obviously no way detectives can identify the actual bees, the thieves can use the stolen bees to supplement their inventory.

Most thefts occur at nighttime, when bees are dormant. Hives are typically moved on flat bed trailers, so it should be considered suspicious if someone is placing them in the bed of a truck. Anyone who notices these types of activities should report them immediately.

A simple way beekeepers can protect themselves is to register their bee hives with the Fresno County Sheriff's Office. Deputies can issue them an Owner Applied Number (OAN). It is a unique number that is stamped on the hives and recorded into the National Crime Information Center's directory. This database helps law enforcement to determine the rightful owner of the marked property. Owners of farm equipment can also request to get an OAN. This program is free of charge.

It's also beneficial to place something identifiable, such as a business card or even a GPS tracking device, inside the hives. All of these measures can help tell law enforcement who to contact if stolen hives are located.

According to a county ordinance, law enforcement may stop any person moving bees in order to determine the legitimacy of their work. Therefore, they must carry proof of ownership and supporting documentation.

Anyone with information on these thefts is asked to please contact the Sheriff's Office at (559) 600-3111 or email aqcrimes@fresnosheriff.org. You may also call Crime Stoppers at (559) 498-7867. You will remain anonymous and may be eligible for a cash reward.