

**SMASH AND GRAB TASK FORCE
AUGUST 15, 1994 TO NOVEMBER 13, 1994
AFTER ACTION REPORT**

INTRODUCTION

The Smash and Grab Task Force was created at the direction of Assistant Director Carlos Alvarez and was operational for 90 days. The Task Force was originated to combat a crime trend toward group burglaries occurring within mall and shopping centers throughout Dade County. The burglaries impacted dramatically on retail businesses and were becoming increasingly popular as a criminal enterprise.

The primary objective of the Task Force was the reduction of smash and grab type burglaries within unincorporated Dade County, the ancillary methods to be used to attain the objective were:

- Establish patterns of criminal activity
- Identify persons involved in the crimes
- Disrupt the activities of identified offenders through the arrests of individuals with outstanding warrants
- Coordinate with other law enforcement agencies to provide information and share intelligence
- Arrest offenders during in-progress burglaries, and/or charges from previous burglaries
- Respond to scenes where smash and grabs occur or subjects are in custody to develop information
- Contact retailers and their security specialists for a positive exchange of information
- Enhance sentencing through reducing plea bargaining and direct filing on juveniles

The Smash and Grab Task Force was successful in accomplishing its stated objective. The remainder of this report will provide a summary of: the planning that took place prior to implementation; the operational phase; problems that were encountered; the results and evaluation of the operation; recommendations; and a conclusion.

PLANNING

The Smash and Grab Task Force was modeled after a pilot program at the Intracoastal District. Based upon this previous experience, personnel from the Intracoastal District were selected to spearhead the Task Force. The Task Force was composed of one lieutenant, three sergeants, and 15 officers who were detached from Police Services.

Funding for the extraordinary expenses involved in the operation in the amount of \$35,000 was provided from a Law Enforcement Trust Fund (LETF) grant entitled Project Reinvestment.

On August 1, 1994, one lieutenant, one sergeant, and three officers from the Intracoastal District were detached to the detail to begin gathering intelligence and to prepare for the overall operation. During this preliminary phase, equipment and materials were obtained, arrangements were prepared for a formal briefing to be conducted, records checks were performed on known offenders to identify persons with outstanding warrants, sources of information were solicited, and information was analyzed.

Liaisons were developed with other law enforcement agencies and every Chief of Police from municipal police departments within Dade County was formally notified of

the implementation from the Task Force. It was additionally requested that any information these agencies had concerning smash and grab burglaries be forwarded to the Task Force to encourage mutual cooperation.

Meetings were held with Assistant State Attorney (ASA) Howard Rosen from the Major Crimes Division, and a method was established for cases involving smash and grab offenders to be tracked by the Office of the State Attorney to ensure cases were not plea bargained. ASA Leon Botkin, Chief of the Juvenile Division, was also contacted and arrangements were made to direct file the charges on specific juvenile offenders in adult court.

The Office of Statewide Prosecution offered to aid in the investigation by exploring the feasibility of bringing charges against smash and grab offenders under the Florida Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO). Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Beth Blechman agreed to monitor the progress of the Task Force and to also assist if separate judicial circuits became involved in the prosecution of a smash and grab burglary.

A system for preserving intelligence was established by developing a weekly reporting process that contained data concerning the week's activities, statistical output, and new information that was received. In addition, a log was maintained which contained photographs and biographical information on arrestees which was disseminated to other law enforcement agencies through the South Florida Investigative Support Center.

investigators assigned conducted intensive interrogations of arrestees to lead to the identification of other offenders, and to attempt to develop confidential informants. Numerous previous smash and grab burglaries were successfully closed based upon arrestees¹ statements and other supporting evidence, such as: videotapes, fingerprints, or other reliable proof. This was a time consuming process but served to enhance the effectiveness of the Task Force.

A great deal of intelligence information was accumulated by the Task Force. The main sources of information were: other police agencies in the tri-county area, retail and security specialists from businesses, Crime Stoppers, the South Florida Investigative Support Center and through extensive interviews with cooperating subjects. An Intelligence Report has been prepared that summarizes much of this information. Some of the intelligence is worthy of special mention.

The smash and grab burglars group at four distinct areas and proceed from those locations to commit their crimes at businesses primarily located in Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. The majority of the crimes have historically taken place in Dade County. Many of the burglars are, or were robbery subjects, who have turned to smash and grab burglaries because the crime is financially lucrative, and the potential for being incarcerated for a lengthy period of time if apprehended is considerably less. These offenders are also commonly the same persons who are involved in "grab and run" type thefts that are occurring with increasing frequency. The potential for violence during confrontations with police, security personnel, or civilians is also increasing as indicated by recent crimes where firearms were present and where actual threats or attacks were utilized against security guards.

The Task Force initially avoided publicity for fear the smash and grab offenders would

become aware of the Task Force and avoid detection. Toward the end of the operation efforts were made to attract media attention by granting interviews and making a press release. One newspaper article was published after an interview was given to a reporter from the Ft. Lauderdale Sun Sentinel. In addition, a Channel 6 reporter interviewed and rode with Task Force members which resulted in a favorable report appearing on two consecutive nights. Task Force personnel also contacted representatives from the retail community and informed them of the results of the Task Force investigations.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

In the beginning of the operation it was anticipated that the investigators would be able to develop a nucleus of confidential informants to provide valuable information. It was soon discovered, however, that the lack of threat of lengthy imprisonment for committing retail burglaries removed the incentive to cooperate. Attempts to utilize continuing criminal enterprise or RICO statutes to access stronger sentencing proved to be generally futile, as these crimes lacked the type of organization required to make those statutes applicable. Reliable sources of information were difficult to cultivate.

Another problem in using confidential informants arose when the burglars were not willing to share information concerning planned smash and grabs with parties who were not going to accompany them to commit the crime. While the investigators could have inserted an informant into a group committing a burglary, a host of liability issues and the danger of being forced to reveal the source during discovery proceedings dictated that the Task Force members not use this approach.

Mobile surveillances of known offenders were not productive. No opportunities to install mobile tracking devices were present and these youthful offenders proved to be

surprisingly alert to being followed. Despite the use of undercover vehicles and surveillance techniques, it was virtually impossible to avoid detection because of the paranoid characteristics of juvenile offenders driving stolen vehicles in neighborhoods in which they are intimately familiar.

Follow-up investigations were hampered by the oftentimes poor quality of photographs available from surveillance cameras installed by businesses. These cameras are commonly video cameras and they do not produce enough lines of resolution to be photographically enhanced to the point where subjects captured on tape can be identified. This problem has been partially addressed by advising retailers of the problem at the regularly scheduled "Operation Icebreaker" meetings attended at the South Florida Investigative Support Center. It has been suggested they consider investing in rapid still photographic equipment in future security equipment installations.

RESULTS/EVALUATION

At the conclusion of the operation, the Task Force was responsible for making a total of 108 arrests (96 felony arrests and 12 misdemeanor arrests). Many of the arrestees had multiple outstanding warrants or juvenile pick-up orders that resulted in 98 message recoveries on persons. Stolen vehicle recoveries numbered 18, with an estimated value of \$240,000. Other stolen property was recovered with an estimated value of \$7,500. Additionally, two handguns were impounded.

Old cases involving smash and grab burglaries that occurred prior to the inception of the Task Force totaling fifty-four, were closed. These numbers will increase as the investigators continue to close old cases after the conclusion of the Task Force based upon information already developed.

The stated objective of the Task Force was to reduce the number of smash and grab burglaries in unincorporated Dade County. Chart 1 depicted earlier in this report, illustrated a portion of the below listed data and displayed the frequency of smash and grab burglaries in the various districts before the implementation of the Task Force. Also listed below is the number of smash and grab burglaries that occurred in those same areas during the period of time the Task Force was operational.

	08/01/93 to 08/14/94	08/15/94 to 11/01/94	Total
District 1	5	1	6
District 2	0	0	0
District 3	29	4	33
District 4	9	0	9
District 5	50	2	52
District 6	44	6	50
District 8	10	0	10
	147	13	160

Analysis of this information reveals that in the period of slightly over one year prior to the operation, there was an average of 11.76 smash and grab burglaries-committed per month within the jurisdictions of our districts. During the time the Task Force was operational that average dropped to 5.2 per month. This represents a 56% reduction in smash and grab burglaries. A memorandum is included in this report that details the methodology used to compile this data.

Criminal Intelligence Analyst Frank Fahringer, from the South Florida Investigative Support Center, states that during the period from August 1, 1993, to August 1, 1994, there were 62 smash and grab burglaries reported to the Center that occurred in Broward and Palm Beach counties. This represents an average of 5.17 burglaries per month. From August 1, 1994, through November 7, 1994, only two burglaries were reported to the Center, for an average of .6 smash and grab burglaries per month. These figures only reveal statistics on these types of burglaries reported and may not be entirely accurate, but certainly seem to indicate a clear trend.

The expenditures from the LETF Grant are listed below and reveal the costs associated with the project:

Overtime	\$ 2,646.92
Vehicle Rentals	\$ 3,788.86
Telephone Rentals	\$ 1,492.33
Beeper Rentals	\$ 407.98
Other Expenses:	
(Invoices, Red-lines, etc.)	<u>\$ 1,141.00</u>
TOTAL LETF COSTS	\$ 34,477.09

The assistance of the State Attorney's Office (SAO) was invaluable and the prosecutorial aspect of the cases was handled very well. The SAO monitored each arrest and, to date, each one has been filed successfully. Furthermore, many of the juvenile offenders who have abused the already weak system have been or are undergoing the bind-over process to adult court. The attention given to this Task Force by prosecutors was extremely important and thus far has been successful.

The personnel assigned to the Task Force sincerely dedicated themselves to the

project. The supervisors conducted themselves professionally and the officers efforts were truly worthy of commendation. A special evaluation is being prepared for each participant documenting their performance during their detachments.

CONCLUSION

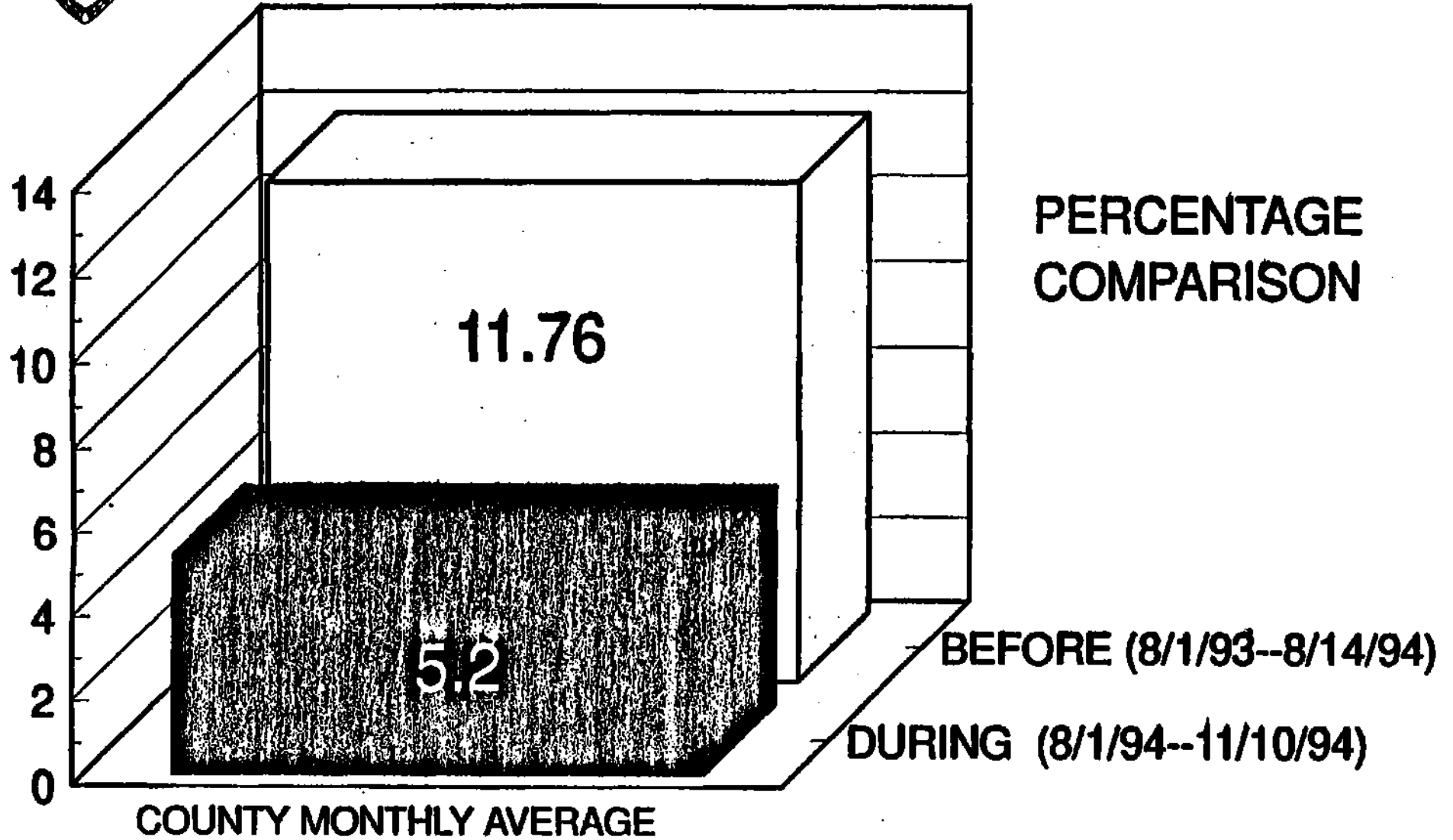
The accomplishments of the Smash and Grab Task Force have demonstrated the level of success that can be obtained by maintaining constant pressure and efforts toward disrupting identified criminal activity.

On November 2, 1994, members of the Task Force met with Special Agent Supervisor Lance Newman and Special Agent Leslie D'Ambrosia from the Florida Department of Law Enforcement (FDLE). Also present was Assistant Statewide Prosecutor Beth Blechman. The purpose of the meeting was to provide TDLE with the intelligence that Task Force personnel have accumulated so they could examine and analyze the material to determine if it would be feasible to pursue a criminal enterprise investigation under the Florida RICO Act. If FDLE elects to conduct such an investigation, it would only center on one group of smash and grab offenders that have displayed a unique form of organization that may make the RICO statute applicable.

At this point it is suggested that we wait to assess the level of permanence the impact of the Task Force will have. Should the future patterns of smash and grab activity again increase, it is recommended the alternatives presented in this report be re-examined to meet the needs of the community we serve.



SMASH AND GRAB TASK FORCE AFTER ACTION ANALYSIS



REDUCTION IN SMASH AND GRAB BURGLARIES = 56 %

Metro-Dade Police Department
Anti-Shoplifting and Grab Task Force
Intelligence Report - November 13, 1994

This Intelligence Report contains information concerning the configuration and modus operandi of groups committing retail smash and grab burglaries in Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach Counties.

I. Characteristics

A. Group Origins - Although these groups lack organization, there are four specific geographical areas that they originate from

1. Overtown - NW 20 to 11 Street from 3RD to 1ST Avenue.
2. Overtown - NW 12 Street to 8 Street on 7 Avenue.
3. Brownsville - NW 46 Street from 23RD to 24TH Avenue.
4. Liberty City - NW 68 to 61 Street from 12TH to 14TH Avenue.

B. Demographics

1. African Americans
2. Approximately 85 % are juveniles.
3. Approximately 90 % are male offenders.

C. Group Size - There are over 180 identified offenders. Specific individuals involved are constantly changing as people are incarcerated, relocate, move onto other types of crimes, or cease to be involved for other reasons. The size of groups that respond to commit individual burglaries can range from 20 people to two. Current trends indicate smaller groups are becoming more popular.

II. Vehicles Used in Burglaries

Different groups utilize separate methodologies, but all groups use stolen vehicles to commit the burglaries. One Overtown faction prefers to strictly use recently stolen vehicles. Other groups may hide stolen vehicles nearby and continue to use them until recovered. The vehicles are primarily stolen from rental agencies, Miami Beach, Miami Lakes, and the Jackson Memorial Hospital areas. The vehicles most favored are Caravans, other Chrysler products (particularly LeBarons, Dynasties, and Accords), Hondas, and cargo vans.

III. Method of Entry:

The most common method of entry is by driving vehicles through doors, shutters, gratings, or glass. Offenders also pry open fire doors or throw objects through glass windows and doors to enter. Many subjects are known to carry bolt cutters to assist in entry.

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Smash and Grab Task Force* Intelligence Report Cont'd

IV. Disposition of Stolen Property

- A. The merchandise is most often sold on the streets from vehicles, abandoned houses, or out of apartments and homes. The property is normally split up by the subjects and each person disposes of his or her own proceeds. Areas near places where drugs are commonly sold are preferred because of the prevalence of cash at those sites.
- B. The stolen property is usually sold for twenty to fifty percent of its actual value.
- C. A structured fencing operation or distribution point for bulk sales has not been found; however, leads which have recently been received indicate that there may be such an operation. An investigation into this possibility is ongoing.

V. Victimst

- A. Smash and grab burglars choose locations where expensive clothing items are sold. Common victims include Burdines, the Gap, Macy's, Lord and Taylor, and specialty shops that carry this type of expensive merchandise* Shirts, shoes, jacket's, and purses are the items most frequently stolen in addition to sports apparel.
- B. Electronic and stereo equipment stores are often victimized as well. The subjects are searching for cellular phones, walkie-talkie type equipment that they can use themselves, VCRs, stereo equipment, and other items they can quickly dispose of.

VI. Trends/ Impact:

- A. Current information indicates that the flood of arrests by the Task Force has forced the two Overtown groups to temporarily pool resources in order to put together enough people to commit smash and grabs.
- B. Criminal Intelligence Analyst Frank Fahringer, from the South Florida Investigative Support Center, states that smash and grab - burglaries at "anchor" stores in malls have dropped off drastically in the tri-county area since the inception of the Task Force.
- C. Information also reveals that "runout" thefts while stores are open are occurring more frequently. In addition thefts of employees personnel belongings are occurring within smaller speciality stores. The offenders refer to this type of theft as "creeping". One offender will distract store personnel while another walks undetected into back rooms and rifles through employee's belongings or petty cash drawers. The offender then exits through a fire door or emergency exit.