

Cars-for-cash deals draw DEA suspicion

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ness? And, of course, it's difficult to remove myself from my responsibility, and what I think is all citizens' responsibility. That (Massey's concern about unjust accusation) would be my position if I was a businessman in that case," Coone said.

But Coone qualified his statement by saying he thinks there is no such thing as "recreational drug use" anymore, that people now are starting to realize how dangerous drugs are and the impact they have on people.

"There's nothing unconstitutional. It doesn't violate that individual's rights, to drop a telephone call on

the DEA, customs, FBI or IRS. They're (car dealers) human beings, they're citizens, they know just as well as I do that there's something wrong with that transaction. Now not criminally wrong, but there's something wrong. People don't carry that kind of money around," Coone said.

FRANK LOPEZ, sales manager for the Jeep-Eagle division of Bob Saks in Farmington Hills, said he agreed with Massey.

"First of all, it's against the law to accept any cash transaction over \$10,000 without reporting it," Lopez said.

"Second, I cannot tell (if a person is suspicious) or pass judgment on that particular individual, so we have no particular policy (about what to do under such circumstances)."

"That particular segment of the market (cash buyers fitting the above description) doesn't seem to come into the Farmington Hills area," Lopez said.

CHARLES GHEQUIERE, owner of Estate Motors in Birmingham, which sells Mercedes-Benz cars, said he hasn't seen someone produce cash for a car in a long time.

"The used to happen to us years ago. It's virtually gone away."

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according to U.S. Marshal of the region, Anthony Bertoni, Oakland and Wayne counties are part of the district.

The U.S. Marshal Service, a federal police force, is "custodian" of seized property and money," Bertoni said.

IN 1988, assets included a 21-unit apartment building in Wayne County and three drug stores and a condominium development east of Rochester in Oakland County.

"Thirty million is what's been seized," Bertoni said.

Not all has been legally forfeited, and that which is "will not necessarily sell for full value. It's a rough figure," Bertoni said.

Proceeds are "pumped back" into federal agencies and local governments for use in the continuing fight against drugs.

ZERO TOLERANCE, launched last April by U.S. Customs, has netted 732 auto seized at Michigan-Canadian border crossings for "exceeding user-amounts of narcotics," according to Michael Jordan, chief inspector for the Port of Detroit.

The confiscated vehicles are sold at public auctions conducted nationwide by Northrop Worldwide, an Oklahoma-based subsidiary of Northrop Corp. In an ironic twist, former owners are given first opportunity to repurchase their confiscated vehicles.

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A shipment of counterfeit Pony dolls was seized last Christmas for allegedly violating trademark laws, and four foreign trucks were recently seized because they allegedly violated import standards. Many items are seized because they are not declared — "people trying to cheat by not paying customs," Jordan said.

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