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Reports of Crime Follow Attacks

By Kathleen Kerr
STAFF WRITER

City and state officials warned Friday that the seedier side of human nature has emerged amid all the reports of goodwill among those working near the World Trade Center disaster.

Expensive watches — $3,000 worth — were stolen from a store near the World Trade Center, people posing as volunteers attempted to steal merchandise from other stores, and a scam involving a fake charity targeted the elderly in the past two days.

Police said one of the arrests made at the World Trade Center following the crash occurred early Thursday morning when Deputy Commissioner of Administration Tibor Kerekes spotted two men outside a Tourneau jewelry store that had been struck by falling debris from the crash.

The two, who possessed two watches and a Swiss Army knife, were spotted allegedly trying to ditch their loot when Kerekes arrested them, police said. They were identified as Mark Kunsstorum, 42, of Long Island City, and Martin Ross, 30, of Glen Head. The two were charged with grand larceny and burglary. Kunsstorum is a retired correction officer, police said.

Two arrested in theft; warning of charity scam

There were also reports of people entering the blocks near the disaster site posing as volunteers and then attempting to steal from stores or to make off with items found near the crumbled buildings.

Mayor Rudolph Giuliani said that elderly people had received phone calls from a phony charity requesting donations to help the victims of the World Trade Center attack. Police are investigating the calls.

"If somebody asks for a donation to help the surviving families or the heroes or anything like that, call up the police and the FBI and tell us who's calling you, and we'll go out and arrest them," Giuliani said. "We'd really like to catch them and make an example of them."

Giuliani and Gov. George Pataki both said that legitimate charities were not known to be doing phone solicitations for disaster relief.

Jon Sorenson, a spokesman for the state Consumer Protection Board, said one scam was operating out of Putnam County. Callers asked people to donate to the American Red Cross in order to help disaster victims and their families.

Pataki urged people who want to make monetary donations to give to the New York State World Trade Center Relief Fund (1-800-801-8092 or P.O. Box 5028, Albany, N.Y., 12205), which will be coordinated with the September 11th Fund, established by the United Way of New York City, the New York Community Trust and the Twin Towers Fund.

The state attorney general's office generally investigates phony charity solicitations. People who want to help the disaster victims should be careful about their donations, said Darren Dopp, a spokesman for state Attorney General Eliot Spitzer.

"The best advice is to make sure you are giving to a reputable group or an established group — the American Red Cross, for instance," Dopp said.

People who have questions about charities should call 518-486-9797 to check whether they are registered with the state, although some legitimate charities may not be registered.

Staff writers Leonard Levitt and Joshua Robin along with The Associated Press contributed to this story.

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