

PRESS RELEASE

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MULTI AGENCY SWOOP ON COUNTERFEIT FRAUDSTERS

Ten people were arrested in the early hours of yesterday morning following raids at addresses across North Wales, Cheshire and the Wirral. The arrests followed an operation to uncover rip-off merchants who claim benefits whilst making a living selling pirate DVDs to bargain hunters on Greenfield Market in Flintshire.

A multi-agency taskforce led by the Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) investigated allegations of benefit fraud and other illegal activity in a joint operation codenamed 'Buzzard'.

DWP Shadow Economy Teams from Merseyside, Cheshire and North Wales, combined forces with Trading Standards, HM Revenue & Customs and three police forces, resulting in thousands of counterfeit DVDs, CDs and computer games being seized with a monetary value of over £600,000. The investigators also worked closely with organisations from the music, game and film industry including FACT investigators and FACT logistical assistance.

Following the intelligence-led initiative, the ten were arrested under suspicion of being involved in the production and sale of counterfeit optical discs, and some of those arrested were also in receipt of benefits. Cash, drugs and cigarettes were also seized during the raids. Those arrested were taken to police stations in North Wales and Cheshire and are helping with further enquiries.

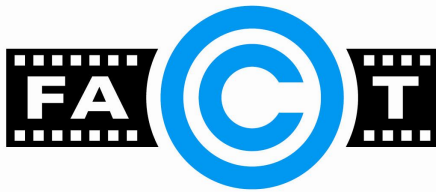
Roy Paul, Unit Fraud Investigator for Cheshire and Merseyside said:

"Today's result demonstrates what we can achieve through shared intelligence and joint working with our partner agencies. Counterfeiting is often disregarded as a crime but experience shows there is a distinct link between counterfeiting, benefit fraud and other types of serious crime, affecting taxpayers and the general public."

Ron Hughes Trading Standards Manager for Flintshire County Council added:

"This has been a wonderful example of a joint working partnership arrangement. Whilst our investigations are still at an early stage it appears from the items seized that the intelligence-led partnership working has been worthwhile."

Continues...



“I would warn anybody who may be involved in the supply of counterfeit goods that once convicted by the courts, the penalties can be very severe including lengthy custodial sentences. As well as losing all the goods involved, offenders also risk having their assets seized under new ‘Proceeds of Crime’ legislation.”

Jim Angell, FACT Director of Operations commented:

“We are delighted to be able to work with DWP and Police in a multi-agency operation targeting a number of the most prolific DVD pirates in North Wales. Once again this proves that film piracy is a serious crime that does not operate in isolation but is linked to many other facets of criminality.”

Notes to Editors

- The three Police forces involved are: North Wales, Cheshire and Merseyside.
- Five Trading Standards Authorities involved include: Flintshire, Cheshire, Conway, Wirral, and Wrexham.

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Notes to editors:

About FACT

The Federation Against Copyright Theft is the UK’s leading trade organisation established to protect and represent the interests of the film and broadcasting industry against copyright and trademark infringements. Established in 1983, FACT works closely with statutory law enforcement agencies to combat the growth of pirate DVDs, film and other forms of broadcast material including the increasing threat from online/internet-based piracy. FACT has been accepted as a prosecution authority and engages in criminal prosecutions in its own right.

The maximum penalty for offences of film piracy is 10 years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. Proceeds of Crime Act legislation now also enables confiscation of assets and goods obtained through criminal activity.

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