



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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L.A. CITY ATTORNEY ROCKY DELGADILLO CHARGES UNLICENSED GAS STATION OWNER WITH SELLING BLACK MARKET TOBACCO PRODUCTS

LOS ANGELES – Los Angeles City Attorney Rocky Delgadillo today announced his Tobacco Enforcement Unit has filed criminal charges against the owner of three gas stations for selling tobacco products without a tobacco permit and possessing black market cigarettes for sale.

Jafar Rashid, 42, was charged with 19 criminal counts including selling without a City of Los Angeles Tobacco Retailer's Permit or State Cigarette License, possessing unstamped cigarettes, possessing cigarettes with counterfeit stamps, possessing untaxed cigarettes and tobacco products, and failing to keep accurate records for tobacco inventory. If convicted, Rashid could face up to 11 years in jail and a mandatory minimum penalty of \$9,100.

An investigation against Rashid was launched following a notice from the State Department of Health Services that his business, Western Valero gas station, had sold tobacco to minors in March 2001 and 2003. These two violations would ordinarily trigger a 30 day tobacco permit suspension under the Los Angeles Municipal Code. However, investigators with the Tobacco Enforcement Program soon discovered that Western Valero did not have a current City of Los Angeles Tobacco Retailer's Permit for the program to suspend.

On May 3rd, investigators conducted an undercover purchase of cigarettes to confirm Western Valero was selling tobacco products without a City permit. Purchased cigarettes were also found to have counterfeit tax stamps, prompting an investigation by the State Board of Equalization into three gas stations owned by Rashid – Western Valero, Century Gas, and JR Shell.

Board of Equalization investigators found a total of 91 cartons of black market tobacco products containing counterfeit tax stamps at the three locations. In addition, over 1,000 untaxed tobacco products including cigars and cigarillos were seized.

Results of the investigation were forwarded to City Attorney Delgadillo's Tobacco Enforcement Unit for prosecution by Deputy City Attorney Celina Porras.

All tobacco vendors in Los Angeles are required to obtain a permit from the City in order to sell tobacco products. The cost of an annual tobacco permit is \$208, which is used to fund the City Attorney's Tobacco Enforcement Program. Currently, there are over 4,850 registered tobacco retailers in the City. The City Attorney's Tobacco Enforcement Program has conducted more than 3,526 compliance checks and issued violations to more than 950 retailers for illegally selling to minors. Recent expansion of the program has led to 70 City tobacco permit suspensions for repeat offenders.

In addition, the Tobacco Enforcement Program has filed 330 criminal cases for offenses ranging from black market tobacco sales, illegal street peddling, and selling tobacco without proper State and City permits. The Program has a 100% conviction rate, resulting in thousands of dollars in penalties on behalf of the State Board of Equalization and the City of Los Angeles.

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