

Agencies quiet on seizure

Counterfeit loot seized in BR raid

BY BILL LODGE

Advocate staff writer

May 13, 2012

0 Comments

Investigators of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement seized 7,800 items of clothing, shoes, jewelry, perfume and sunglasses in Baton Rouge on May 4, 2011.

Each of the items carried a counterfeit trademark, federal officials say in an April 26 legal notice placed in *The Advocate*.

But there were no press releases from ICE or the local U.S. Attorney's Office about the seizure in 2011. And, a year later, officials of both agencies remain silent about the investigation that led to the loot.

Officials of U.S. Customs and Border Protection say the confiscated collection has an appraised value of \$288,002. In their published newspaper notices, Customs officials stated that all of the knockoffs would be "disposed of" if no one claimed them before the close of business Friday.

There was no response to telephone requests for comment from ICE officials in New Orleans. Officials of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Baton Rouge listened to questions, but answered none.

None of the officials would reveal the address or addresses where the Baton Rouge raids took place. They also would not say whether any arrests were made. And they would not say whether last year's investigation is ongoing in 2012.

Leslie G. Dillmann, of the New Orleans office of Customs and Border Protection, confirmed that the knockoff items would be destroyed if they remained unclaimed Friday.

Dillmann — CBP's officer for fines, penalties and forfeitures in Louisiana — said she has no information about the Baton Rouge investigation that led to the seizure.

"We get hundreds of seizures a year in Louisiana," Dillmann noted. "At least 300 to 400 seizures a year in Louisiana."

Added Dillmann: "I can't tell you exactly where it (clothes, shoes, jewelry, perfume and sunglasses) was seized. Most of the counterfeit stuff is coming into the United States from China."

The newspaper notices of the seized items are required by law, Dillmann explained.

Once the deadline for claiming any of the seized items passes, Dillmann said, “We will issue destruction orders. We do not allow counterfeit products to be distributed in this country.”

Does anyone ever contact Dillmann and ask to claim seized items?

“Usually not,” Dillmann said.

Occasionally, Dillmann added, someone will come to her and state that he or she purchased the items over the Internet. Those people always claim they were unaware that the seized items were knockoffs bearing bogus trademarks, she said.

Such claims, however, will not prevent destruction of the seized items, Dillmann added.

“This problem is significant,” Dillmann explained. “It is ongoing, and it costs domestic trademark owners a lot of money.”

Where is the stuff that was seized in Baton Rouge last year?

“It’s not in Baton Rouge,” Dillmann said. She said items with counterfeit trademarks automatically are sent to a federal contractor, VSE Corp., which warehouses the goods at Newark, N.J., Riverside, Calif., and Miami, Fla.

Whenever possible, Dillmann said, VSE recycles seized products. For example, she said, the rubber soles of athletic shoes can be shredded for use in making other rubber products.

While importation of trademark knockoffs is a growing problem in Baton Rouge and Louisiana, Dillmann said, the state’s rate of growth is not larger than that of the nation as a whole.

“Los Angeles, John F. Kennedy Airport in New York, Newark, Dallas, the bigger markets actually have bigger problems,” Dillmann said.