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Twenty arrested for trying to buy fake driver licenses

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Twenty people described by authorities as Turkish, Mexican and Guatemalan nationals possibly ripe for terrorist recruitment were arrested after they tried to buy fake driver licenses from undercover officers in Collier County.

Authorities say two of the arrested tried to obtain commercial driver licenses and one attempted to get a special endorsement to allow him to transport hazardous materials.

"Those two items were particularly ominous," said Collier County Sheriff Don Hunter, who heads the regional domestic security task force that covers Southwest Florida.

Federal, state and local law enforcement officers say they are still investigating whether there are any terrorism links involving the 20 arrested. Hunter said the investigation is continuing.

"We've been careful not to suggest they are terrorists," Hunter said. "But they certainly represent the potential for recruitment."



Chief of Florida Domestic Security Steve Lauer, right, speaks at a press conference Wednesday with Collier County Sheriff Don Hunter, center, and Tara Maguire, left, supervisory special agent for the Immigration and Naturalization Service. The cooperative effort netted 20 arrests on charges of trying to buy false drivers licenses. *Dan Wagner/Staff*

A team effort by the Collier County Sheriff's Office and the Region 6 Domestic Security Task Force snared the 20 early Wednesday morning

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in a sting operation when they were lured to a local hotel to pick up their licenses.

On Sept. 27, one of the men, Ahmet Celik, 34, a Turkish national, came to the Collier County Tax Collector's Office in East Naples, arrest reports say.

He confronted a driver license examiner and asked for a commercial driver license for his brother, Ali Celik, arrest reports say. Celik was told to have his brother apply for a license through the proper channels.

"Ahmet stated that (his brother) was not willing to do that, and that he wished to just pay for one," arrest reports say.

He said he had buyers for the fake licenses who would pay between \$1,000 and \$2,000.

But the information about people seeking to buy licenses was passed onto authorities and they set up the sting at the Comfort Inn on Tollgate Boulevard near Interstate 75.

As the 19 people showed up to buy their licenses, undercover officers met them. After they completed the license application and paid the cash for the license, they were arrested, reports say. Deputies say they seized \$18,020 from the group.

The 20 were being detained under Florida law on charges of possession or intent to possess a fraudulent driver license and bribery of a public official, third-degree felonies punishable by up to five years in prison. Celik, of 5381 Treetops Drive, East Naples, was charged with conspiracy to bribe a public official, a first-degree misdemeanor, which is punishable by up to a year in prison. All were being held without bond.

Immigration and Naturalization Service agents will interview and investigate whether the 20 are legally in the United States. Officials said any who are found to be in the country illegally will be deported and indicated that most of the group would most likely be found to be here illegally.

Steve Lauer, the chief of Florida Domestic Security, said the arrests were part of Gov. Jeb Bush's move to tighten up driver license laws and prevent possible terrorists from gaining identification, which allows them to stay in the country. Several of the Sept. 11 hijackers took advantage of lax Florida laws to acquire driver licenses illegally.

"We may never know..." Lauer said. "We could have stopped a terrorist attack."

Hunter said the sting wasn't a roundup of illegals. The sheriff had been

criticized by some members of the Hispanic community who feared Hunter and his deputies would hunt down undocumented workers in Immokalee and arrest them.

"These people came to us," Hunter said.

Nationality was never an issue, both Hunter and Lauer said.

"If they had been Germans walking through the door, it would have been the same," Lauer said.

Arrested in the sting along with Celik were: Esteban Aguayo, 38, of 1289 Benson St., East Naples; Ercan Aydin, 32, of Fort Lauderdale; Ali Celik, 37, and Canan Celik, 32, both of 5381 Treetops Drive, East Naples; Freddie Chun, 42, of an unavailable address on Rattlesnake Hammock Road, East Naples; Alicia DeLeon, 33, of 2715 Thomasson Drive, East Naples; Jesus Garcia Aguirre, 20, of 11470 Whistler's Cover Circle, East Naples; Walfred Gomez, 19, of Fort Myers; Huseyin Gungor, 47, 20018 U.S. 41 E., East Naples; Armahan Helvaci, 41, and Abdullah Ozcelik, 24, of 2365 14th Ave. N.E. in Golden Gate Estates.

Selvin Hernandez, 23, also of an unavailable address on Rattlesnake Hammock Road in East Naples; Carlos Martinez Lora, 17, of 5522 Hardee St., East Naples; Angel Maldonado, 22, of 63 Whistler's Cove Circle; Juan Aguayo, 19, and Diosado Robles, 23, both of 289 Benson St., East Naples; Daniel Ortiz, 23, of Sarasota; Perfecto Sanchez, 30, of 13600 Lake Park Blvd., East Naples and Seref Ozeau, 34, of 5361 Cherrywood Drive, Golden Gate Estates.



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