Detectives Investigate Ongoing Confidence Game Involving Elderly Victims

On March 20th, 2013 we sent out a media alert (see below) regarding two incidents involving two men coming to the homes of elderly residents claiming to be from the City’s Water Department and needing access to the home’s interior. Once inside, one suspect would distract the resident while the other would move about stealing valuables.

Since that release there have been several other incidents that detectives believe were perpetrated by the same two suspects utilizing a different mode of distraction.

In those cases the two suspects have approached the homes of elderly residents and inquired about providing some service such as fixing a seawall, fence repair or pest control.

While outside discussing the job with the intended victim, the suspects will claim to see a spider which they will attempt to spray with a bottle of insecticide they have their possession. The suspects will “accidentally” spray the victim’s hands with the alleged insecticide and then claim that it has an acid base which must be diluted with a milk product to avoid injury to the victim.

The suspects will escort the victim into the house and assist in applying the milk to the victim’s hands during which the suspects will have them remove any rings, watches or bracelets so their hands can be thoroughly cleaned. It is during this process that the jewelry is pocketed and an opportunity for one of the suspects to look into other rooms for other valuables to steal becomes available.

The most recent incident took place in the 8296 33rd Avenue North on April 24, 2013. The victim in that case, Mary Porter, has indicated that she will speak with the media.

Both men are described as Hispanic, with one man being his late 20’s to early 30’s, 5’6” to 5’8” medium build, with black hair, slight mustached wearing a grey hat. The second suspect is described as being in his late 40’s to early 50’s, 5’6” to 5’8”, heavy build with darker skin and heavy accent and does most of the talking. They were last seen in a grayish or silver early 2000 model minivan, possibly Chrysler or Honda, with no rims and heavy tint. They have been seen in other vehicles in past cases.

Detectives believe that these suspects may be responsible for seven reported incidents in the City of St. Petersburg since the beginning of the year and five of those have occurred within a 1 mile area located between 22 Avenue North to 34th Avenue North, from Park Street west to the Boca Ciega Bay.

It is highly likely that suspects have approached other residents who did not provide an opportunity for these men to victimize them or who may be unaware that property has been taken from their home.

Detectives are asking anyone who believes they may have been contacted by these men to call the St. Petersburg Police or their local law enforcement agency should they live outside our jurisdiction.
Anyone who believes they may have information that would be helpful in identifying these suspects are asked to call Detective Karl Sauer at 727-893-4904 or the St. Petersburg Police at 727-893-7780.

Lastly, the St. Petersburg Police Department is reminding citizens to be guarded when strangers approach their homes unsolicited, especially those who attempt to seek entry for whatever reason or who attempt to entice you to step outside your home to look at something. In those instances it would be appropriate to secure yourself in home and call your local law enforcement agency immediately.

Information released by Mike Puetz, 727-893-7550, michael.puetz@stpete.org

###

Previous release of Mar 20, 2013 09:14:35

Detectives Investigate Possible Water Department Scam

Since the beginning of March the St Petersburg Police Department has investigated two incidents involving two men coming to the homes of elderly residents claiming to be from the City’s Water Department. The men claimed that they needed to check the hot water pipes and once allowed inside they split up, with one going to the kitchen and the other going to a bathroom.

In one case the two men were described as Hispanic, with both having accents. One man appeared to be in his early thirties, 5’8”, 195 lbs and was wearing a ball cap with “Gallaway” written on it. The other man appeared to be in his forties, 6’2, 200 lbs with dark hair and a “rough looking face”. Neither was wearing uniforms or had identification cards. Both men were seen leaving in a white Mercedes SUV with no markings on it.

Detectives believe that this may be part of a pattern of similar scams by which the suspects identify themselves as city employees claiming they need access to a home to check some sort of alleged problem.

Although nothing was discovered missing in these two recent cases, this appears to be part of a scam where typically one man will keep the resident distracted while the other rummages through the home looking for valuables to steal. The elderly are most frequently targeted.

Typically municipal workers are in uniform, display proper identification and operate vehicles that are clearly marked. Furthermore municipal employees generally work on public roads and right of ways and normally do not require entry into private homes.

Detectives would like to urge citizens to be on the alert for such scams and contact their local law enforcement agency should they encounter or become aware of any activity of this nature.

Information released by Mike Puetz, 727 893 7550, michael.puetz@stpete.org