

**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council****February 15, 2022**

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SUBJECT: FICTITIOUS LICENSE PLATES

The Fort Worth Police Department (FWPD) seeks to identify fictitious license plates as officers routinely investigate on-view violations during traffic and preventative patrol enforcement, including traffic accidents and offenses involving motor vehicles. During the past year, FWPD made eleven arrests involving fictitious license plates, generated twenty reports for the offense of Display Fictitious License Plate, issued five citations for Display Fictitious License Plate, investigated five cases with disposition of elements not being met, and impounded seven vehicles associated with this offense. Staffing and other resource constraints, however, may present challenges in the consistent enforcement and investigation of fictitious license plates.

FWPD has been working with the North Central Texas Council of Governments (NCTCOG) and the Texas Department of Motor Vehicles (Tx DMV) to address the prevalence of fictitious license plates. NCTCOG and Tx DMV are taking the following actions:

NCTCOG

- Lobbying Texas legislature to get funding for law enforcement to help combat the illegal temporary paper tag issue.
- Actively working to secure federal funding to form emissions task forces to address fraudulent vehicle inspections and temporary registration tags.
- Task force conducting covert operations on vehicle emissions inspection stations to identify and prosecute inspectors performing improper inspections.
- Identifying and prosecuting those who counterfeit or improperly issue temporary tags

Tx DMV

- IT staff to set limits on the number of eTAGs that a licensed dealer can create and issue in a calendar year.
- Enforcement Division initiated aggressive pre-licensing inspection requirement for applicants.
- Investigators when investigating any complaints will run an eTAG report to identify any irregularities in the number of tags being issued.
- Actively working with local law enforcement to assist in joint investigations related to unlawfully offering and issuing eTAGs.
- Enforcement Division working closely with investigative and compliance programs of social media platforms to identify and remove advertisements, postings, and groups related to unlawful sale of Texas temporary tags.

House Bill 3927, passed during the 87th Legislative Session (2021), removed the statutory prohibition and authorized Tx DMV to deny a dealer's or converter's access to the temporary tag database if Tx DMV determines that a dealer or converter fraudulently obtained temporary tags. The dealer or converter may appeal the department's determination but, during the appeal process, the dealer or converter is no longer able to engage in fraudulent activity.

Law enforcement faces various obstacles in dealing with fictitious license plates. The process to become a DMV agent to issue temporary paper plates is easy for a violator to complete. License plates are researched in a database by officers during traffic stops and the returns may inaccurately show the plates as valid, as state

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databases have not been updated. Criminals can access and input false vehicle information into the database. The State's delays in reviewing the database and confirming vehicle information is resulting in continued illegal activity. Tx DMV acknowledges that flaws in the system allow criminals to infiltrate the system and distribute thousands of dealer tags to vehicles illegally.

From a law enforcement perspective, this is a national criminal issue. Media reports detail such problems in states throughout the country. FWPD will continue to work in partnership with NCTCOG and Tx DMV to remain up to date on this issue. The issuance of fictitious paper plates is largely an administrative issue that Tx DMV is seeking to address at the state level.

For further information about this topic, please contact Deputy Chief Pedro Criado at 817-392-3635 or Pedro.Criado@fortworthtexas.gov.

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