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Dozens of Day Laborers Arrested in Police Sweep

BYLINE: From Times Staff and Wire Reports

BODY:

Responding to complaints from the public, undercover police arrested dozens of day laborers under a local ordinance that prohibits soliciting for employment in public, authorities said Friday.

Police, posing as people seeking to hire workers, made 58 arrests over three days at two intersections.

Most of the arrests were for violating the ordinance, but several of those arrested had warrants for other crimes.

The sweep was prompted by allegations that the day laborers were harassing people, drinking and urinating in public.

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The Associated Press State & Local Wire

October 22, 2004, Redondo Beach police arrests day laborers in crackdown

Responding to complaints from the public, undercover police arrested dozens of day laborers under a local ordinance that prohibits soliciting for employment in public, authorities said Friday.

Police, posing as people seeking to hire workers, made 58 arrests over three days at two intersections, police Capt. Joe Leonardi said.

Most of the arrests were for violating the municipal solicitation law, but several had warrants for other crimes, including burglary and driving under the influence. Two men were arrested twice for soliciting work in separate operations.

The arrests were prompted by complaints from the public that the day laborers were harassing people or creating a nuisance by drinking or urinating in public, Leonardi said.

"A lot of people look at this as a victimless crime, but the fact is that a lot of people are affected by this," he said.

Redondo Beach has in the past looked into creating a place for day laborers to gather, but the Los Angeles suburb has not been able to spare the expense.

The police plan to stage additional undercover operations against the laborers and also against people who hire them, Leonardi said. An operation against those who hire the laborers was canceled this week because of the rain.

Many cities have ordinances prohibiting day laborers from soliciting work in public but arrests are rare, said Thomas Saenz, vice president of litigation for the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund.

"In general, our position is that ordinances that prohibit day laborers from soliciting work from public areas are unconstitutional," Saenz said.

MALDEF has filed lawsuits against cities to challenge the ordinances and is monitoring the situation in Redondo Beach, but he declined to say whether the organization planned to take action.

So far, 10 of those arrested in the three operations this month have pleaded guilty and received three years summary probation, a 180-day suspended sentence, ordered to pay a booking fee of about \$300 and ordered to stay away from the intersections used by the laborers, Leonardi said.

The operations did not involve federal immigration authorities, he said.