



NEWS RELEASE

Andy Skoogman, Director of Communications

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CONTACT:

Andy Skoogman, 651-201-7171

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STATE PATROL LAUNCHES CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION INTO DENNY HECKER AUTOMOTIVE GROUP

State Establishes 1-800 Hotline to Field Calls from Consumers

ST. PAUL — The Minnesota State Patrol's Motor Vehicle Crimes Task Force is investigating dozens of consumer complaints of felony motor vehicle fraud against Denny Hecker Automotive Group. The complaints are being made by customers who have either purchased a vehicle from, or traded-in a vehicle at, a Denny Hecker Automotive Group dealership over the past several months. The alleged victims are from 15 counties across Minnesota.

Colonel Mark Dunaski, chief of the Minnesota State Patrol, said that there are likely more potential victims and announced that the State Patrol has established a special hotline to field calls from consumers. That number is 1-800-593-5000. Dunaski said investigators are receiving complaints daily.

According to investigators, there are two types of complaints:

Consumers purchase a vehicle, pay the 6.5 percent sales tax as well as the title and license registration fees to the dealer, but never receive their title or license plates

Consumers trade in their vehicles and are later informed by their lender that the lien on that vehicle has not been paid off.

In some cases, consumers have complained of being the victim of both scenarios after trading in a vehicle as part of a new car purchase.

Dunaski also said that investigators with the State Patrol, the Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (BCA) and other Minnesota law enforcement agencies executed search warrants at six locations across the state today. Investigators conducted searches at the Denny Hecker Automotive Group corporate headquarters in St. Louis Park, three homes owned by Hecker (two in Medina and one in Cross Lake), and two Denny Hecker Automotive Group dealerships: Southview Chevrolet in Inver Grove Heights and Stillwater GMC Cadillac in Oak Park Heights. The dealership in Oak Park Heights is no longer operating.

"Based on the nature of the complaints we've received so far, we have reason to believe motor vehicle fraud may have occurred," Dunaski said. "The number and severity of citizen complaints prompted us to take action with the goal of resolving the problems both for consumers and the state of Minnesota."

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It is a felony under Minnesota law for a dealership to fail to remit to the state the sales tax collected from the sale of a motor vehicle, punishable by a prison term of up to five years and a fine not to exceed \$10,000. It is also a felony to fail to pay off a lien when a motor vehicle dealer takes a vehicle in trade when there is a lien on that vehicle, punishable by a prison term of up to three years and a fine not to exceed \$6,000.

Local law enforcement agencies assisting in this investigation include the Washington County Sheriff's Office, the Crow Wing County Sheriff's Office, Medina Police, St. Louis Park Police and Inver Grove Heights Police.

About the Motor Vehicle Crime Task Force

The Minnesota State Patrol Motor Vehicle Crime Task Force was created by legislation in 1998. It is staffed by state troopers and support staff to investigate crimes committed by persons and dealerships regarding the purchase, sale, registration, theft or other fraudulent acts relating to motor vehicles.

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