



NEWS RELEASE

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ARSON TASK FORCE CREATED

Paterson, New Jersey

December 22, 2009

Passaic County Prosecutor Camelia M. Valdes announced the formation of an Arson Task Force, which was launched in collaboration with Mayor Jose "Joey" Torres' Risk Management Program to identify vacant and abandoned buildings in the City of Paterson, New Jersey to reduce the risk of accidental and/or deliberately set fires in those buildings. The Arson Task Force is comprised of members of the Passaic County Prosecutor's Office, Paterson Police Department, Paterson Fire Department, Paterson Department of Public Works, and Paterson Department of Community Development.

As part of Mayor Torres' risk management program, the Arson Task Force identified a number of vacant and/or abandoned buildings which are often the site for criminal trespass, narcotics use and fires. On Wednesday, December 22, 2009, the Arson Task Force launched "Operation Red Cap." "Operation Red Cap" began at 4:00 a.m. and targeted twenty eight buildings for initial inspections, which resulted in many violations of the New Jersey Uniform Fire Code being uncovered. The violations represented a potential source of fire ignition requiring the Public Utilities to be shut off at these locations. The buildings were located on North Third Street, Governor Street, Godwin Avenue and Hamilton Avenue, all in the City of Paterson. Law enforcement personnel entered vacant or abandoned building structures and searched for persons occupying same without the permission of the owners. Any persons located in the buildings were directed to seek shelter at either Eva's Village or St. Paul's Community Development Corporation, both located in Paterson. During the search, eight adults were discovered in the buildings. Four people were arrested on outstanding warrants and the remaining four people were directed to area shelters.

"Operation Red Cap" will continue its inspections of at other vacant buildings located in Paterson at various times throughout the year.