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Suspect set to plead guilty in Fort Worth counterfeit movie and music case

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FORT WORTH -- Thousands of copies of top movies and music CDs were available for the picking when police and music industry investigators swept into the Henderson Bazaar in north Fort Worth.

Harry Potter, Puss in Boots, Fast & Furious -- all were available at rock-bottom prices.

But the 10,000-plus copies seized in the November raid were illegal bootleg video and music recordings, part of an international crime industry that costs Texas hundreds of millions of dollars in loss to the economy and nearly 6,000 jobs a year, investigators say.

"It's a billion-dollar industry," said Tarrant County Assistant District Attorney Martin Purselley, who is handling prosecution of the cases. "They were pretty blatant, selling counterfeit movies and music."

Two vendors fled on foot when investigators from the Fort Worth Police Department and the Recording Industry Association of America arrived, but five people were arrested and charged with selling the counterfeit items. One, Ignacio Juaraz, 36, of Fort Worth, is set to plead guilty today in Criminal District Court No. 1.

The "labeling" violation is a third-degree felony, punishable by up to five years in prison and \$250,000 in fines, depending on how many unauthorized recordings are held within 180 day. It's a violation not of the state penal code but of the business and commerce code.

The toll of piracy

Theft of music alone costs the nation more than 70,000 jobs in the music industry and more than \$2 billion in lost wages, according to a study by the Institute for Policy Innovation. The institute, based in Lewisville, says it advocates lower taxes, fewer regulations and a smaller and less intrusive government.

In Texas, which has a vibrant music industry, music piracy costs an estimated \$760 million and nearly 6,000 jobs, including losses in retail sales jobs, according to the study.

Those figures don't include billions in similar losses to the movie industry.

The recording industry association frequently works with local law enforcement agencies, going undercover to identify bootleg items and help local authorities identify pirated products, association officials say.

Purselley said some of the items are as crude as video of movies taken while the movie is being shown in a theater, and then copied onto a disc.

"It's just a pure rip-off," he said.

Five indicted

In the Henderson Bazaar, 1000 Henderson St., agents for the recording industry went undercover after learning that vendors likely were selling illegal goods, police have said.

Agents bought audio recordings that did not disclose the name of the performer or the name and address of the manufacturer on the cover as required by law.

At one booth, the vendor had a CD burner to make pirated copies there, Purselley said.

The five people arrested at the bazaar were indicted last week by a Tarrant County grand jury on the labeling charges.

In addition to Juaraz, those charged are: Saraid Corbella, 41, who also had CD-burning equipment; Angel Martinez Munoz, 33; Maria Arrieta, 39; and Yesenia Martinez, 33, all of Fort Worth.

They are awaiting trial in Tarrant County.

"It's bad for the industry," Purselley said. "Legitimate artists get ripped off. It's a crime that preys on the ignorant."

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