



FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
INTELLIGENCE BULLETIN

Dallas Division

26 March 2013

(U//FOUO) Vulnerability for Corruption Revealed in Crime Stoppers' Program

(U//FOUO) The FBI assesses with high confidence,^a based on plea agreements detailed in federal court documents, the Crime Stoppers^b program is vulnerable to corruption by Law Enforcement (LE) personnel and others with access to sensitive program information due to the necessity to protect callers' identities. As a national and international program implemented locally, Crime Stoppers pays cash rewards for anonymous tips that lead to arrests and prosecutions. The protection of the tipsters' identity, which is fundamental to the program's success, creates a vulnerability to corruption. This assessment is based on two separate and unrelated fraud schemes that occurred simultaneously in Dallas, Texas, involving a corrupt Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) and a bank teller. The LEO and the teller exploited the protection of tipster's anonymity by using accomplices to fraudulently claim cash rewards.

(U//FOUO) The FBI assesses with medium confidence, based on the similarities among all Crime Stoppers programs and potential differences in oversight, the vulnerabilities identified in the Dallas Crime Stoppers' program highlight vulnerabilities found in similar Crime Stoppers programs nationwide. A case out of the Miami Field Office, similar to the Dallas cases, revealed exploitation of the program's anonymity, while in the San Antonio Field Office this anonymity has hampered the investigation of a separate allegation. The Dallas investigation has revealed several indicators of corruption that may aid in the detection of corruption schemes in Crime Stoppers programs across the country.

^a (U//FOUO) **High confidence** indicates that judgments are based on high quality information from multiple sources and/or the nature of the issue makes it possible to render a solid judgment. **Medium confidence** indicates information is credibly sourced and plausible, but can be interpreted in various ways; or, is not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence. **Low confidence** indicates the credibility or plausibility of the information is questionable, the information is too fragmented or poorly corroborated to make solid analytical judgments, or the FBI has significant concerns with the sources.

^b (U) See Appendix A for Background information about Crime Stoppers USA® and the North Texas Crime Commission (NTCC).

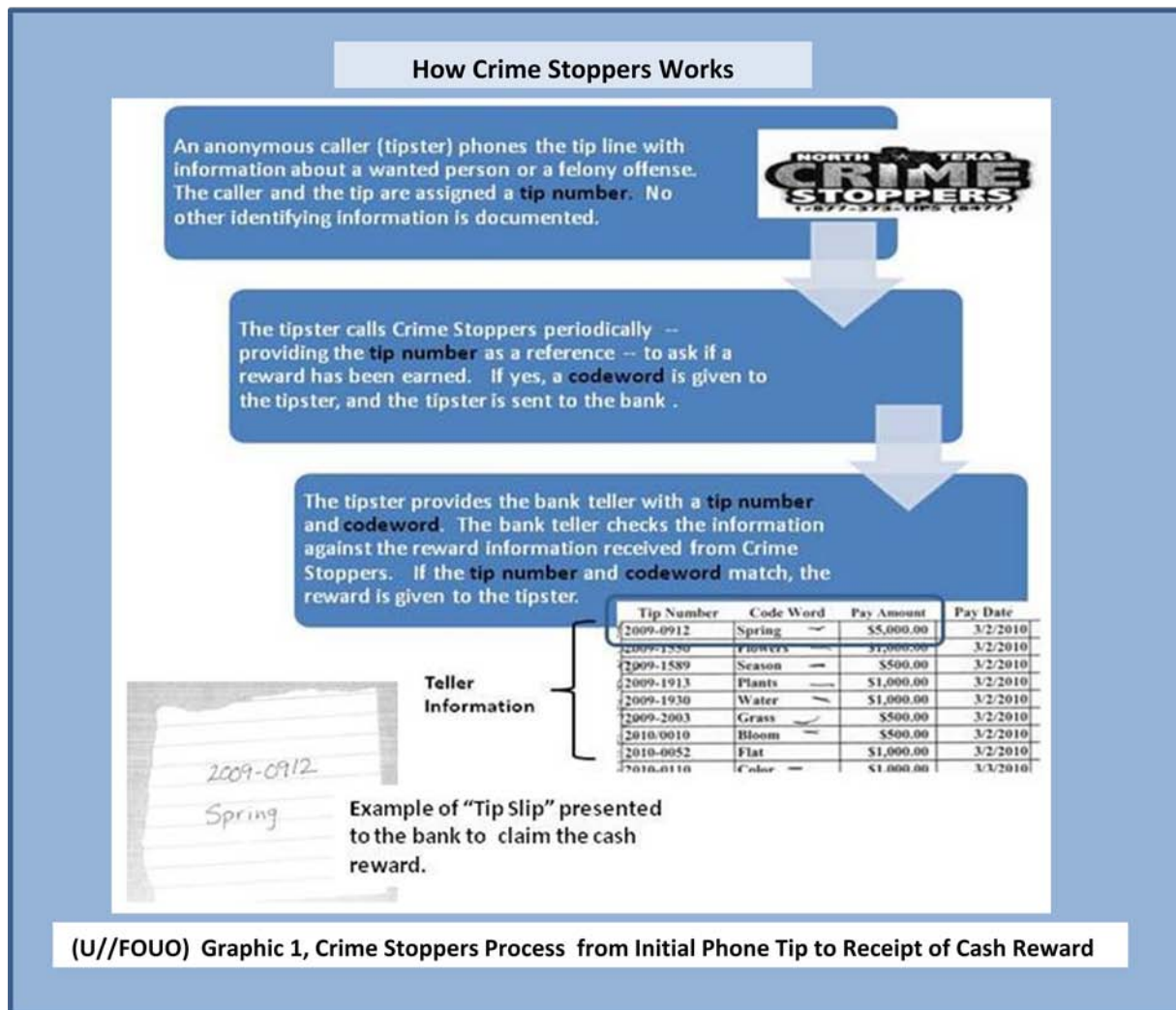
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(U) Source Summary Statement

(U//FOUO) Information in this intelligence bulletin dates from 2005-2013, with key judgments based on guilty pleas entered August 2012 and March 2013, wherein the subjects corroborate the witness interviews and forensic analysis of financial and law enforcement documents obtained under court order. Liaison contacts from the Dallas Police Department provided additional information as did open source information from the Web sites of the North Texas Crime Commission (NTCC), Crime Stoppers USA, and Chase Bank. The guilty pleas were most critical to the judgments in this product as they provide undisputed, first-hand details of the fraud schemes. Judgments regarding Crime Stoppers vulnerabilities nationwide would benefit from additional information about local oversight procedures that may mitigate the threat.

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(U) Program Anonymity Creates Vulnerability to Corruption

(U//FOUO) The FBI assesses with high confidence, based on plea agreements detailed in federal court documents, that the inherent anonymity of the Crime Stoppers program (see Graphic 1) reveals vulnerability for corruption. Exploitation of this vulnerability, which complicates detection of fraud schemes, results in financial losses to the program and a potential loss of public confidence.

- (U//FOUO) According to the federal court document that details the facts contained in the plea agreement, former Crime Stoppers Coordinator, and Dallas Police Department (DPD) Senior Corporal Theadora Ross, altered or fabricated tips to generate over \$250,000.00 in fraudulent reward money between 2007 and 2012.^c An accomplice claimed the bogus rewards using tip numbers and codewords provided by Ross.¹
- (U//FOUO) Blair Lopez, a bank teller at the Crime Stoppers' designated bank, also defrauded the program, stealing over \$18,000 of reward money not claimed by the tipster, during a concurrent two-month period in 2012. According to the details contained in Lopez' plea agreement and admissions made by Lopez' accomplice, Lopez had access to Crime Stoppers' tip numbers and codewords which she provided to the accomplice.^{2,3}

(U//FOUO) Vulnerabilities Revealed in Dallas Likely Extend to Programs Nationwide

(U//FOUO) The FBI assesses with medium confidence similar vulnerabilities to insider corruption by LE and bank personnel likely exist in Crime Stoppers programs nationwide. The assessment is based on similar corruption activities and allegations in Miami, Florida, and Laredo, Texas, the anonymity central to all programs across the United States, and the decentralized oversight of the Crime Stoppers program nationwide. The FBI's limited information regarding each program's local oversight, however, reduces the confidence in this judgment.

- (U//FOUO) According to a 26 August 2009 press release from the FBI Miami Field Office, Miami-Dade Police Detective Wayne Fortella defrauded Miami Crime Stoppers out of \$15,000, between April 2003 and March 2008. Fortella passed tip numbers and codewords to two accomplices who fraudulently claimed the reward money.⁴
- (U//FOUO) According to an LE liaison contact as of 31 May 2012, a county-level LE officer in Laredo, Texas, destroyed computer and online records related to the Crime Stoppers program, possibly in an attempt to conceal embezzlement of Crime Stoppers reward funds.⁵ On multiple occasions, the Laredo subject directed two LE officers to claim Crime Stoppers' rewards and bring the reward money to the subject to allegedly pass rewards to confidential sources of other LE agencies, according to information provided by LE officers with direct access to the information. However, the missing

^c (U) See Appendix B for additional details about the methods Ross used to fabricate bogus tips to generate fraudulent Crime Stoppers rewards.

records and the anonymous nature of the reward claim process has impeded the investigation of these incidents, and the verification of rewards being passed to other agencies' sources.⁶

- (U) According to the Crime Stoppers USA Web site,⁷ National Crime Stoppers program member organizations are required to operate an anonymous tip line.

(U) Outlook and Implications

(U//FOUO) The FBI assesses the Crime Stoppers program is vulnerable to fraud, due to the anonymity that is central to the success of the program. The FBI further assesses it is likely that other fraudsters have attempted or will attempt similar schemes, based on the ease with which the subjects defrauded Crime Stoppers in Dallas and Miami. The anonymity afforded the Crime Stoppers' tipsters and minimal information required to claim a reward reduces the ability to detect fraud and frustrates investigative efforts. The Dallas case identified two separate threat vectors – creation of bogus tips by a Crime Stoppers coordinator and targeting unclaimed rewards – which are viable schemes for use in other cities. Crime Stoppers programs in other cities could suffer financial losses and loss of public confidence if similar schemes occur. However, several indicators (graphic right), identified from these similar schemes, may alert LE to the possibility of Crime Stoppers fraud and aid in detection.

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(U) Potential Indicators of Crime Stoppers Corruption

- (U//FOUO) Unexplained affluence of LE officers in the Crime Stoppers Office
- (U//FOUO) Controlling/secretive behavior by the Crime Stoppers' Coordinator
- (U//FOUO) High percentages of tips earning rewards
- (U//FOUO) Lack of an independent oversight process
- (U//FOUO) The same person observed collecting rewards on multiple occasions
- (U//FOUO) Tipsters asking for reward money that has already been claimed

(U) Intelligence Collection Requirements: This intelligence bulletin addresses requirements contained in the FBI National Standing Collection Requirements for Public Corruption contained in USA-CRIM-CID-SR-0046-12.I.B.6.

(U) This product has been prepared by the Dallas Division of the FBI. Comments and queries may be addressed to the Dallas Field Intelligence Group at 972-559-5000.

(U) Appendix A

(U) Crime Stoppers USA® and the North Texas Crime Commission (NTCC)

(U) Crime Stoppers USA is a national non-profit umbrella organization that works to provide the means for LE departments to pay rewards to anonymous tipsters for information leading to arrests. In addition, Crime Stoppers USA sets general guidelines under which member organizations operate, to include the following:⁸

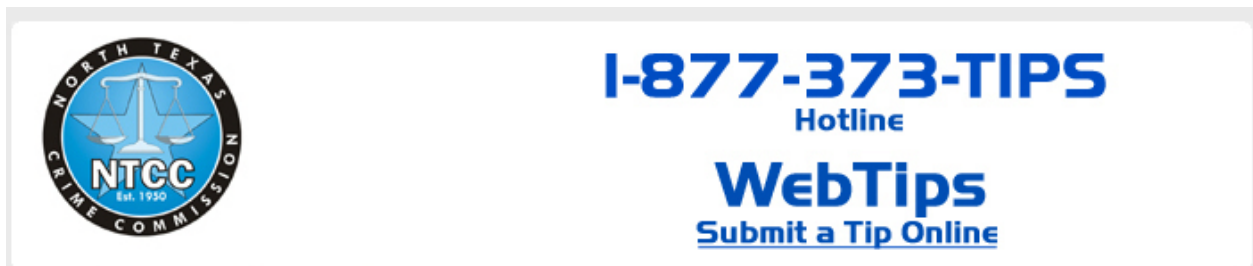
- A volunteer board of directors
- Non-profit status in the state
- A program coordinator provided by an affiliated LE organization
- An anonymous tip line
- Cash rewards that do not greatly exceed the \$1000 guideline

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(U) The NTCC is a Crime Stoppers USA member organization that operates under the Crime Stoppers USA umbrella. The NTCC manages Dallas Crime Stoppers Program, funded with fees assessed with court costs in the Dallas area courts.⁹ The NTCC uses the national anonymous Crime Stoppers Tip Line 1-877-373-TIPS (8477). During off-duty hours, tips are taken by a national call center, and later picked up and transferred to the local Crime Stoppers office.

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(U) Appendix B

(U) Threat Vectors: Creation of Bogus Tips and Unclaimed Rewards

(U//FOUO) According to the plea agreement, former DPD Senior Corporal and Crime Stoppers' Coordinator Theadora Ross admitted to various methods used in her scheme to defraud the Dallas Crime Stoppers. Forensic analysis of financial and law enforcement records obtained via a search warrant, found DPD Ross, created bogus "tips" which she submitted for rewards claimed by her accomplice. In her position as Crime Stoppers Coordinator, Ross effectively controlled which tips received rewards, being the sole person to make reward recommendations to the NTCC, which approved and funded the rewards.

- (U//FOUO) Ross altered national call center tips,^d associating the tips with unrelated arrests. In at least six instances, the NTCC tip reports did not match the subject information in the call received by the call center.¹⁰
- (U//FOUO) Ross used other methods including creating duplicate rewards for the same subject arrest and fabricating rewards by attributing a random arrest to an unrelated tip.¹¹
- (U//FOUO) Ross included bogus tips with list of the legitimate rewards that she emailed monthly to a local Chase bank branch location with the tip numbers, codewords, reward amounts, and pay dates.¹²

(U//FOUO) According to an 18 December 2012 indictment and a 5 March 2013 plea agreement signed by former Chase bank teller Blair Lopez, Lopez provided tip numbers and codewords associated with unclaimed rewards to an accomplice to collect.¹³

- (U//FOUO) A 28 June 2012 interview with Lopez' accomplice, Eva Barrientos, revealed that Lopez recruited Barrientos to take "easy money" from Crime Stoppers.¹⁴
- (U//FOUO) According to Barrientos, Lopez told her that many people did not pick up their rewards and Lopez had access to tip numbers and codewords needed to claim those rewards.¹⁵

^d (U) During off-duty hours, the Crime Stoppers USA® national call center handled calls and took tips, which were later passed to the local Crime Stoppers office in Dallas.

Endnotes

¹ (U) FBI; US District Court, Northern District of Texas; Case No. 3:11-CR-11-N; Factual Resume; UNITED STATES v. THEADORA ROSS; 7 August 2012; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED; the Factual Resume details the elements of the crime to which Ross plead guilty.

² (U) FBI; 8 March 2013; 8 March 2013; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED; Contains details of subject Lopez' guilty plea.

³ (U) FBI; 28 June 2012; 2 July 2012.; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED; Interview of Eva Barrientos; source was a subject of the investigation.

⁴ (U) FBI; Joint Press Release with the AUSA for the Southern District of Florida and the Miami-Dade PD; "City of Miami Police Officer and Two Others Charged in Crime Stoppers Scam;" 26 August 2009.

⁵ (U) FBI; Letterhead Memorandum: Prosecutive summary to USAO; 15 February 2013; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED; To document a prosecutive summary provided to the USAO Laredo.

⁶ (U) FBI; To provide a case update and request a six month extension of the captioned Preliminary Investigation; 21 November 2012; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED; The document summarized the investigation and provided a justification for extending the Preliminary Investigation.

⁷ (U) North Texas Crime Commission Web Site, accessed on 3 December 2012; available at <http://ntccrimecom.org/about>.

⁸ (U) *Ibid.*

⁹ (U) *Ibid.*

¹⁰ (U) FBI; 12 April 2012; 12 April 2012; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED; To provide case updates and examples of corrupt tips; The EC explains the various bogus tips identified through forensic investigation, some of which was corroborated by subject admissions and plea agreements.

¹¹ (U) *Ibid.*

¹² (U) FBI; FD-302; 8 November 2010; 15 November 2010; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED; Interview of Jean Maier-Dean; source was the Chairman of the Crime Committee, North Texas Crime Commission.

¹³ (U) FBI; 28 June 2012; 2 July 2012.; UNCLASSIFIED; UNCLASSIFIED; Interview of Eva Barrientos; source was a subject of the investigation.

¹⁴ (U) *Ibid.*

¹⁵ (U) *Ibid.*

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