

Feds: Counterfeit airbags found in Union home

Investigation started in Tenn.; black market for bags thrives

By: Meghan Cooke, Charlotte Observer

A Union County man is facing trafficking charges after federal agents said they found more than 1,600 counterfeit airbags – an auto part that experts say is being sold in a profitable black market.

On Thursday, agents raided 26-year-old Igor Borodin's Indian Trail home, as well as a northeast Charlotte auto shop, where authorities said they discovered the counterfeit airbags.

Authorities said the seized airbags, which bore car manufacturers' marks, were confirmed as counterfeits by experts. Court documents say the airbags failed to comply with regulatory requirements, but it's unclear whether the airbags function properly.

It's also unclear whether any local drivers may have had the counterfeit airbags installed in their vehicles.

"There is a thriving black market for airbags and airbag parts because there's good profit in it," said James Quiggle, spokesman for the **Coalition Against Insurance Fraud**. "Much of that profit is illicit, and it comes at the expense of the safety of drivers."

Borodin apparently became a suspect in 2011, when a federal investigation into the sale of counterfeit airbags in Tennessee identified him as selling "numerous" counterfeit airbags, according to court documents filed Friday in U.S. District Court.

On June 22, authorities notified Borodin that they'd seized 60 airbags. A month later – after Borodin had changed his shipping destination – agents seized 20 more counterfeit bags that were bound for him, according to court documents.

On Thursday, federal authorities executed search warrants at Borodin's home on Crismark Drive, in a neighborhood off Mill Grove Road in Indian Trail. There, authorities said they found 1,514 counterfeit airbags, along with thousands of dollars in cash.

Federal agents could be seen removing items from the house Thursday, packing them in boxes that lined the driveway.

Records show Borodin bought the home last August. A neighbor told Observer news partner WCNC-TV that the house was newly built and that its occupants had moved in only a few months ago.

Borodin told investigators he knew the airbags were counterfeit, according to court documents. A public records search shows Borodin has no

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Coalition Against Insurance Fraud

criminal record aside from traffic violations that were later dismissed.

Also Thursday, authorities went to a business at 6833 Orr Road in Charlotte, an address that belongs to Krugger Auto. According to court documents, authorities discovered 99 counterfeit airbags there.

An employee at Krugger Auto told WSOC-TV that Borodin works as a mechanic at the shop. He said federal agents came to the shop Thursday, asking for receipts and other documents. He also told the TV station there was no evidence that the shop's customers might be driving with counterfeit airbags in their vehicles.

When reached by the Observer, the same employee declined to comment.

Krugger Auto's website says it opened as a body shop in 2005 and then expanded in 2010 to also become a dealership.

"Our knowledge and experience enable us to provide our customer with properly rebuilt vehicle at affordable price (sic) without sacrificing its safety and performance," the website says.

Court documents do not implicate Krugger Auto in trafficking crimes nor say whether the shop used any counterfeit airbags.

Quiggle said airbags and other auto parts can be easily found for sale online. Some are legitimate and functioning, but many are not.