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Birmingham police launch Operation Omnipresence, seek help from area truck drivers in watching and reporting crime

Outside service workers to train in spotting crime

Tuesday, June 24, 2008

CAROL ROBINSON
News staff writer

Birmingham police want to add hundreds of pairs of eyes and ears to the crime-fighting force.

The department is preparing to launch Operation Omnipresence, soliciting the help of area companies to be on the lookout for, and to report, crimes they run across in the course of a normal business day.

"A lot of people see things, and they don't recognize that what they see could be a crime, or important to a crime," said Birmingham police burglary Lt. Jamal McCaskey. "They can help us build a case."

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Through the initiative, Birmingham police will train outside service workers, technicians and delivery people in spotting and reporting criminal activity or suspicious behavior, accidents, lost children or injured people.

"It's not to put these employees in any kind of danger," McCaskey said, "but to provide an additional resource for us."

The first company to sign on is Bright House Networks. Police have been in talks for several months with the cable company, which has about 60 trucks on the city streets each day.

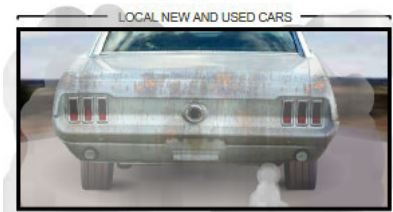
Bright House has been doing something similar on its own since 2005 when it launched Operation Bright Eyes in Tampa. Company authorities said service technicians have rescued young children who wandered away from their homes, helped hit-and-run victims, and reported house fires and attempted home burglaries.

The program's success in the Tampa Bay area led to plans to expand the efforts in Indianapolis, Birmingham, Bakersfield, Orlando and Detroit.

Robert Smith, director of public affairs for Bright House Networks in Birmingham, said it's important to find new ways to fight crime.

"We see a lot of things in the run of a day's time," Smith said. "We hope to make an impact."

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