



Riverside County District Attorney

NEWS RELEASE

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MAN CHARGED WITH ILLEGALLY SEEKING PAYMENTS FROM BUSINESS OWNERS IN TWO COUNTIES FOR EXPIRED FICTITIOUS BUSINESS NAMES

RIVERSIDE – A Riverside man was recently arraigned on charges he was illegally seeking payments from business owners in Riverside and San Bernardino counties for expired fictitious business names.

Thomas Gerald Elder, DOB: 9-21-67, was arrested and booked on Nov. 30, 2011. He was arraigned in Riverside Superior Court on Dec. 2, 2011, where he entered not guilty pleas to all counts. He has a felony settlement conference scheduled for Dec. 13, 2011.

Elder is charged with three felonies; forgery of an official seal, grand theft exceeding \$950 and attempted grand theft in excess of \$950, as well as a misdemeanor count of false advertising.

The investigation began in March 2011 when a business owner contacted the Riverside County Assessor-Clerk-Recorder (ACR) saying he received a notice in the mail stating his fictitious business name had expired and that for a \$501 fee he could have it renewed. The cost for legally filing with the county is typically less than \$50. The notice came from a business called the San Bernardino-Riverside County Fictitious Business Name Violators Office. It was determined that about a week earlier Thomas Elder filed a fictitious business name for that company with the Riverside County ACR Office. It is alleged that Elder altered county documents by removing the county clerk's address and inserting his own post office box address and added his company logo along with the county ACR office logo, giving the impression his company was affiliated with the county.

It is believed that Elder's scam has victimized dozens of business owners in the two counties. The investigation is ongoing to determine how many victims there may be.

The case is being prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Reno Cervantes of the Special Prosecution Section.

Business owners who may be a victim of this fictitious business name scam can go to the DA's Office consumer information page at: <http://www.rivcoda.org/consumerinfo.html> then go to the Special Prosecutions Complaint Form.

The Riverside County District Attorney's Office takes very seriously scams like this in which hard-working residents and business owners of the county are targeted. The DA's Special Prosecutions Section will continue to vigorously investigate and prosecute such cases. For example, in October, a man was sentenced to jail and ordered to pay \$417,000 in restitution to victims of a grant deed scam involving his illegal business called Title Compliance Office.