

# Police Sweep Fulton Mall In War on Illegal Vendors

## Seize Fake Goods Of High Quality

By Brad Hamilton  
(Additional material by  
Raanan Geberez)

Last week's three-day sweep of unlicensed peddling at the Fulton Mall netted some hefty numbers: 15 arrests and more than \$150,000 in bogus merchandise, according to police.

Operation Peddler Pushback, which cops from the 84th Precinct completed Saturday with the help of various city agencies, shed new light on the widespread problem of street merchants who sell counterfeit goods.

Some of the products so closely resembled legitimate merchandise that even cops didn't know which was real and which was fake.

"I couldn't tell the difference," said Sgt. John Geary, of the 84th Precinct's Community Policing Unit.

Geary said that Guess? apparel

seized by cops was particularly authentic-looking.

To help distinguish the pirated logos, police were joined by representatives from the city's Consumer Affairs department and music and video industry experts.

The products, ranging from music and videotapes to watches, hats and T-shirts, were confiscated by cops and vouchered at the 84th Precinct's station house.

Geary said that some of the merchandise would be given out to poor families during the holidays.

The arrests were all for violating copyrighting infringement regulations.

Offenders were issued criminal summonses and arrested rather than give desk appearance tickets as in the past, part of a stepped-up effort by police to rid the Fulton Mall of unauthorized vending. Suspects face up to a year in jail.

There are no official estimates on the amount companies lose each year to stolen copyrights, but one trade

analyst said the figure is probably more than \$100 million annually.

Illegal merchants have become so sophisticated that many of their counterfeit goods, such as music cassette tapes, are almost impossible to detect by the average shopper.

During the Fulton Mall raid, cops uncovered a large machine that merchants used to stamp out fake album

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covers for cassette tapes.

Doug Corrigan, staff supervisor of the New York office of the Motion Picture Association of America, added that last weekend's sweep of the Mall, which his staff cooperated with, netted 857 illegal videocassettes. Of the 15 people arrested, four were specifically arrested for selling bootleg videos, he said.

"People selling illegally copied videocassettes have posed a big problem citywide, not only at the Fulton Mall but in other locations—NostRAND Avenue in Brooklyn, Fordham Road in the Bronx, 125th Street and Canal Street in Manhattan," said Corrigan.

Since late 1992, he added, the association has been cooperating with police precincts throughout the city, sending its investigators out on raids. "We've seized thousands and thousands of illegal videos," he said.

How can pirates make copies of new movies? Simple, says Corrigan. "They take a mini-camcorder into a movie theater and point it at the screen. But it's very poor quality."

### Strike Was a First

The strike marked the first time that vendors have been arrested while

working the Fulton Mall.

Previously, they were summoned for violating Environmental Control Board regulations, which meant they got a desk-appearance ticket. Often the summonses were ignored, police said.

During the sweep, merchants were asked to produce a valid vending license or other ID. If they could not, they were arrested on the spot and their products were confiscated.

The charge: unlicensed general vending, which comes with a maximum penalty of one year in jail.

Three of the arrests Thursday were for unlicensed vending. Five were for copyright infringement.

Consumer Affairs agents also issued six summonses and confiscated 300 bootleg videos worth about \$12,000. They took 1,000 counterfeit cassette tapes, 250 garments and eight watches.

Sanitation and Health department agents handed out 13 tickets to food vendors for code violations.

### Small Crimes Count

Lt. Monaghan said that he hoped the arrests would bring an increased "sense of lawfulness" to the area, which has been plagued by gunfire, robberies and burglaries.

"If you take care of the little things, the high crimes will follow," he said.

With an estimated 25,000 unlicensed merchants working in New York City, the problem is difficult to control, according to Bill Griffin of Consumer Affairs.

Griffin's department, with only a small staff, is responsible for stopping illegal vending in all five boroughs.

Police at the 84th have been continually frustrated in their efforts to rid the Fulton Mall of unauthorized selling, despite issuing numerous citations and confiscating van-loads of merchandise.

The Mall, which is said to be the second busiest shopping strip in New York after Fifth Avenue, is simply too tempting a location for Brooklyn merchants, according to police.

They said that some vendors make \$600 a week — and pay no tax.

Prior to last week's raid, Captain William Dwyer, commander of the 84th precinct, sent out a letter to all legitimate Fulton Mall merchants warning them about the pending crackdown on peddlers.

"We're hoping this is a deterrent," said Briscoe.