

IAMI's 2006 Investigator of the Year

Officer Barry Sweitzer, Detective Ricky Whitmire and Detective Chris Millirons, all the Baltimore County Police Department, were recently recognized as "Investigators of the Year" by the International Association of Marine Investigators. The award is sponsored by BoatU.S. The trio put two individuals behind bars who had stolen dozens of recreational boat outdrives worth over \$100,000.

The investigation began when Officer Sweitzer, concerned about the theft of boat outdrives, began visiting marinas, getting to know dockhands and local watermen. He passed out flyers describing the theft of outdrives, the expensive, lower propulsion units that are commonly found on the stern of many motor-powered vessels.

As thefts occurred, Officer Sweitzer got the name of a suspect who was believed to be fencing outdrives. With this information, the department assigned Dets. Whitmire and Millirons to the case. Surveillance was set up and a GPS tracking device was surreptitiously installed on the suspect's vehicle. Within 24 hours the vehicle was tracked to a marina where it spent a mere 18 minutes before heading to a marine salvage business that buys and sells used parts. Shortly thereafter, it was discovered that four outdrives had been stolen from the marina.

A gathering of regional police agencies decided that all the vessels which had been targets of thefts would be dusted for fingerprints and other evidence gathered. BoatU.S. Marine Insurance and Mercruiser, the outdrive manufacturer, were both enlisted to identify previous theft. "Data dots" – tiny bits of film the size of a grain of sand that contain identification data - were applied to hundreds of potential theft targets in order to identify the outdrive if it was stolen.

After many hours of surveillance, a second suspect was identified, the marine salvage business' owner, who was selling reconditioned outdrives online. But still more proof was needed.

Finally, the suspect was followed to a storage yard which held several boats. During broad daylight, the suspect removed an outdrive in an incredible five minutes and quickly departed to another business where he sold the outdrive. An undercover detective was then sent to "purchase" the evidence.

Three search warrants were issued shortly thereafter, including the first suspect's residence, his vehicle, and the second suspect's business. In addition to tools and marina pass keys, a total of 36 stolen outdrives were recovered.

The first suspect pled guilty and received a five-year sentence and agreed to pay restitution; the second suspect received 15 years at his first trial and awaits a second in an adjacent county.

Karlton Kilby, immediate past president of IAMI, said, "This case shows that initiative and teamwork produces results. Baltimore area boaters can rest a little easier now that these two felons are off the streets," he declared.

IAMI's devoted solely to training law enforcement officers and civilian marine investigators in both the mechanics and the art of marine theft investigation. Over 10,000 law enforcement and insurance industry personnel have been trained to date.