Autos checked for drugs, traffic violations

By CALVIN LEAR
Acadiana bureau

LAFAYETTE—Police officers in a unit designed to attack neighborhood crime set up road blocks Thursday on South Sterling Street to check cars for drugs and traffic violations, a police spokesman said.

A similar operation by the ACTION unit of the Police Department on Wednesday netted 53 traffic citations and the arrest of four drivers on traffic violations, and one who faces a drug charge, said Sgt. Ned Ewing.

Thursday's road block took up four blocks of South Sterling from Pinhook Road to 12th Street. It began at 2 p.m. and Ewing said it was expected to last until 9 p.m.

ACTION is an acronym for ‘Attacking Crime Through Involvement of Neighborhoods.’

Numerous tickets were written for traffic violations, no proof of insurance and vehicle registration problems in the first hour of the operation, Ewing said. The road blocks are the result of residents complaining that their streets are being overrun by drug dealers and people driving in to buy the drugs.

‘These residents are concerned about dope being sold on the street corner, causing problems, including fights,’ Ewing said.

He said residents also complained about vehicles speeding on South Sterling.

‘We’re going to try to come in here and see if we can help them,’ Ewing said.

Residents were receptive to the officers.

‘They can do this 24 hours a day, as far as I’m concerned,’ said one woman who declined to give her name.

‘It’s time,’ said another South Sterling resident, Shirley Benjamin.

‘I’m missing a lot of sleep over all the trouble around here,’ said another woman who also didn’t want to give her name.

One of the women added that the trouble would return as soon as the officers left, but Ewing said the operation was still effective.

“They’ll be back, but this operation will be done again in the future. We’ll pick the streets at random,” he said.

Ewing said he did not immediately have the names of the five motorists arrested in the road blocks in Azalea Park subdivision Wednesday.

The man who was arrested on the drug charge was booked with possession with the intent to distribute crack cocaine, Ewing said.

The man threw a bag of crack cocaine out the passenger-side door as he saw a police officer approaching his driver's side door, Ewing said.

The man did not see a second officer approaching on the passenger side, and the bag hit the officer in the chest, said Ewing.

He said the legality of the road blocks was researched before Wednesday’s operation. The road blocks are legal as long as all violations are checked for, not only drugs, Ewing said.