

CITY AND COUNTY OF
SAN FRANCISCO



TAXI COMMISSION
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CALIFORNIA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CITY AND STATE UNITE to DRIVE AWAY
ILLEGALLY OPERATING LIMOUSINES IN
SAN FRANCISCO
12 Misdemeanor Arrests; 2 Vehicle Tows

SAN FRANCISCO, December 18, 2007 – Just in time for the holidays, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), in its ongoing effort to protect consumers, has partnered with the San Francisco Taxi Commission, the Office of District Attorney, and the San Francisco Police Department to crack down on illegal limousine operators in San Francisco.

In December, San Francisco Police Department's Taxi Detail led a sting operation in which five members of the CPUC's enforcement team and two members of the Taxi Commission posed as "secret shoppers" to see whether limo drivers were unlawfully soliciting passengers or operating for-hire cars without a license. The night of the operation, the Police made 12 misdemeanor arrests of limousine drivers and towed two vehicles.

According to state law, limousine operators may only carry passengers by prearrangement. Limousine operators may not operate like a taxicab by picking up street hails or by transporting unknown passengers. Passengers who wish to take a limousine must contract with them by advance reservation.

"We partner with law enforcement on surprise stings throughout the state at airports and undisclosed locations in an attempt to check for proper licensing," said Richard Clark, director of the CPUC's Consumer Protection and Safety Division, who noted that there are 4,000 licensed limousine operators in California. "We are looking forward to continuing our enforcement actions with the City and County of San Francisco."

“This operation is exciting in that it marks the first time ever collaboration by four separate agencies to address the ongoing issue of illegally operating limousines,” said Heidi Machen, executive director of the Taxi Commission for the City and County of San Francisco. “Our goal is to protect customers from unscrupulous operators who may be both literally and figuratively taking them for a ride and to ensure an even playing field for business for our 1,400 metered taxis and taxi drivers that must adhere to strict regulations and inspections.” The Taxi Commission is charged with licensing and permitting San Francisco taxicabs and drivers.

The San Francisco Police Department confirmed that illegal limousine drivers are a threat to public safety and they want to alert the public that the laws can protect them.

San Francisco Police Department spokesperson Captain Thomas O’Neill said, “Unless passengers pre-arrange their limousine ride with a reputable company, there is no way of knowing who is driving them or whether they are properly licensed and insured. Even hotel passengers who might mistakenly believe that they are somehow protected by a hotel doorman helping them into a limousine must take greater precautions for personal safety.” The Police plan to continue sting operations and to alert the riding public to exercise prudence when seeking a for-hire vehicle. They advise passengers to either take one of San Francisco’s licensed taxicabs or to pre-arrange their trip by limousine or town car, as required by law.

The CPUC requires legitimate limousine companies to be fully licensed and carry worker’s compensation and liability insurance.

The 12 limousine operators were arrested as misdemeanors and were cited to appear in San Francisco Superior Court the week of January 7. Upon receipt of the case files, the District Attorney’s Office will review the cases for charging. Prior to the operation, the District Attorney’s Office also worked with the San Francisco Police Department to identify the legal requirements needed to prove the cases.

“We are sending a message to anyone considering doing illegal business here in San Francisco, and we want to discourage limousine drivers from operating illegally,” said District Attorney Kamala Harris. “Our focus is on protecting the residents of this city, who might unwittingly get into an unlicensed and unregulated vehicle with an unknown driver.”

The CPUC is responsible for licensing and permitting motor carriers of passengers. Consumers may find out if a limousine operator is licensed by going to www.cpuc.ca.gov.

The San Francisco Taxi Commission oversees 7,000 licensed taxi drivers, 1,400 permits to operate a vehicle as a taxicab, 34 taxicab companies, and 11 dispatch companies.

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