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Criminal Charges Filed for Black-Market Ivory Sales

Thousands of dollars in illegal elephant ivory items sold to undercover officers

City Attorney Mara W. Elliott announced today that 15 criminal charges have been filed against a San Diego man suspected of trafficking illegal items crafted from the ivory of elephants in defiance of California law.

The investigation began when officers from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife spotted advertisements online offering items for sale that appeared to be made of ivory. Undercover wildlife officers contacted the seller and eventually arranged to meet him in person.

In two separate incidents, Stephen Shu Wang sold thousands of dollars' worth of ivory to an undercover wildlife officer. The investigation culminated in Department of Fish and Wildlife personnel executing a search warrant at Wang's home and seizing hundreds of pieces of ivory.

The items intended for sale included ivory chess sets, sections of carved elephant tusk, and a wooden room divider constructed with ivory panels.

“Ivory trafficking is a despicable business that perpetuates the brutal slaughter of elephants,” City Attorney Mara W. Elliott said. **“If you are in possession of ivory, it is illegal to sell it, and there are consequences for breaking the law. I thank our partner, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, for prioritizing the prosecution of those who profit from the illegal ivory trade.”**

Eight of the charges are violations of the California Fish and Game Code, which prohibits the illegal possession, importation, or sales of any animal parts for profit. It also prohibits the purchase or sales of ivory. The remaining counts are violations of the state Penal Code, which specifically prohibits the importation, possession, or sale of elephant parts.

A first-time violation of this law is a misdemeanor, subject to criminal penalties of up to a year in jail and fines up to \$40,000 per count, depending upon the value of the items.

A law banning the sale of nearly all ivory in the state of California took effect on July 1, 2016. The ban encompasses the teeth and tusks of elephants, hippopotamus, mammoths, mastodons, walruses, warthogs, whales, and narwhals, as well as rhinoceros horn, regardless of whether it is raw, worked, or powdered, or

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from a store or a private collection. Under the law, advertising the sale of any items containing ivory is also prohibited.

Two types of ivory products are exempted from the ban: musical instruments that are made of less than 20 percent ivory and were manufactured no later than 1975, and antiques that are made of less than 5 percent ivory and are more than 100 years old. Neither exception applies to the items seized in this case.

This case is being prosecuted by Deputy City Attorney Jordan DuBois of the City Attorney's Nuisance Abatement Unit on behalf of the People of the State of California. The Nuisance Abatement Unit was established in 1984 and aggressively enforces public nuisance, land use, and environmental laws in the City of San Diego.

The unit works with numerous City and County agencies to address nuisance properties and blight throughout San Diego; illegal transportation, storage, and disposal of hazardous waste; leaking underground storage tanks; oil spills; lead paint violations; the destruction of historical and archeological resources; illegal grading and dumping; and the destruction of environmentally sensitive land. The unit also works with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to protect the marine environment from fishing in protected areas and to protect endangered species from wildlife trafficking, such as the illegal sale of ivory.

Citizens may report illegal ivory sales, and health and safety and environmental violations to the City Attorney's Nuisance Abatement Unit at 619-533-5655 or CityAttorney@saniego.gov.

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