

DRUGS

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Surveillance Video Catches Police Informant Planting Crack On Business Owner

The latest example of why paid police informants are not always a good idea.



Photo Credit: arfo/Shutterstock.com

July 26, 2013 | The Black male owner of a head-shop selling so-called "tobacco" products in Scotia, New York seems to have been the victim of a police informant's set-up. Surveillance video from Dapp City Smoke Shop shows an unnamed white man in a leather jacket pull what appears to be crack cocaine out of his pocket and place it on the counter. The paid, confidential informant for the Schenectady County Sheriff's Office then photographs the drugs as "evidence."

Head-shop owner Donald Andrews was charged with felonies -- criminal sale and criminal possession of a controlled substance -- that could have put him behind bars for 25 years. Forced to close his store, Andrews had spent three weeks in county jail before his lawyer insisted the grand jury view the surveillance footage. On April 25, after authorities saw the tape, charges were dropped.

This week, the community gathered at a Christian Leadership Conference and expressed their concern with policing tactics, particularly incentivizing bogus busts by using paid informants. Many of them, facing their own charges, have a lot at stake in procuring convictions, however unethically. Community members also expressed concern that the set-up was racially motivated.

"With an informant like this, he will lie and plant things and he can't really be trusted," Robert Outlar, told [NEWS10](#) at the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Many of Andrews' supporters are concerned the same paid informant has acted afoul before, prompting calls for District Attorney Robert Carney to review past cases with which he was involved. The Schenectady County Sheriff Dominic Dagostino however, told [NEWS10](#) he does not believe there are other problems related to the informant. How he could be so sure, given the circumstances, is not clear.

"We believe that police used this same person on other matters, including those involving residents who may have pleaded guilty out of fear of lengthier

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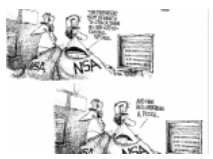
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incarceration or after having concluded that no one would believe they were framed if they denied the accusations," Outlar also said.

Dagostino's officers are currently on the look-out for the unknown informant, who skipped town and is facing perjury and possession charges. According to NEWS10, he participated in seven other cases, two of which led to convictions. Andrews' case is not the first time a paid informant has been linked to shady behavior, but is simply the latest installment in examples of what can go wrong when cold hard cash is linked to a conviction.

Watch the surveillance video from [NEWS10](#):

Kristen Gwynne is an associate editor and drug policy reporter at AlterNet. Follow her on Twitter:

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