

## Arrests Up in Atlanta Airport Restrooms

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ATLANTA (AP) - At the world's busiest airport, plainclothes officers patrolling public restrooms in search of luggage thieves have instead uncovered a rash of other, more sordid crimes.

The new restroom dragnet has led to the arrests of more than 30 people in three months for indecent exposure and public sex acts at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport.

Airport restrooms apparently have become such popular meeting places for men looking for sexual trysts with other men that they have been suggested several times as meeting places in personal ads on the Web site Craigslist.

"Hey ... I'm stuck at the airport from 5 p.m. and I'm looking for a good time ...," one ad reads. In another, the person posting says he is stuck at the airport for three hours in the evening and is looking for "discreet, quick action."

The new patrols were started to stop theft, not catch people in sex acts, police officials say.

Officers started monitoring the restrooms after figuring out that thieves were pulling bags off baggage-claim carousels and taking them into toilet stalls to comb through them.

"We're trying to provide a safe environment for everyone at the airport," said Officer Joseph Villafane, a police spokesman. "We're not out to get all that—it's just we encounter it."

Among those arrested is Ed Wall, the board chairman of the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority. An officer said he saw Wall having oral sex with another man. Wall, who has temporarily stepped down from his post, has maintained his innocence. A court date has not been set.

The other court cases are pending.

James Cates, a clinical psychologist, said airport indecency arrests usually involve people getting caught performing sexual acts. He said it illustrates compulsive behavior known as exhibitionism.

"They're not a lot different from any compulsion ... it's just that this kind of behavior can be offensive to people and can be traumatizing," said Cates, who counsels and performs psychological testing on sex offenders and people with sexual disorders. "They've got to have the thrill and as they keep not getting caught or reported, the thrill gets less and less. It has to become more risky and daring to keep the thrill up."

Still, some say the airport police should have better things to do than stake out restrooms.

"Police have far better things to do with their time than to arrest people for this," said Kenneth Sherrill, professor at Hunter College of The City University of New York. "Being 'sex police' in bathrooms strikes me as a perversion of rational law enforcement activities."

Atlanta's is not the only airport to have had restroom-related arrests. Former Washington,

D.C., Mayor Marion Barry was ordered to pay \$35,000 in damages to a custodian who said he shoved her and exposed himself to her in a bathroom at Baltimore-Washington International Airport in 2000. A year later, a county judge in Michigan was arrested at Detroit Metro Airport for allegedly exposing himself to an undercover officer, although a district attorney decided not to prosecute.

The Atlanta airport police efforts may be working, as new personal ads have on Craigslist have warned people to be careful.

"Do NOT do anything at the airport," one posting from March 29 reads. "If you want to hook up, do it outside the airport! Have fun but be smart about it. It's not worth going to jail for the night and having your face put on the news."

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On The Net:

Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport:

<http://www.atlanta-airport.com>

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