

Super Bowl draws child sex rings

Law enforcement targets human trafficking near event

By Rick Jervis
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Texas law enforcement agents will be hunting for a little-known crime during this week's Super Bowl festivities in metropolitan Dallas: child sex rings.

Incidents of underage prostitution have spiked during previous Super Bowls, leading to some arrests, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott says.

His office, working closely with the FBI, is bringing in at least a dozen extra agents from Austin and other cities to monitor and combat cases of trafficking in underage

prostitutes during Super Bowl XLV in Arlington, he says.

"The Super Bowl is the greatest show on Earth, but it also has an ugly underbelly," Abbott says. "It's commonly known as the single largest human trafficking incident in the United States."

FBI agents often team up with federal, state and local law enforcement officials during Super Bowls to prevent terrorist attacks, ticket scams and other crimes, including high-priced prostitution. Law enforcement agents increasingly are linking up with child advocate groups to crack down on the trafficking

and exploitation of minors during the event, says Ernie Allen, president of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children.

Tens of thousands of party-minded football enthusiasts descending into a Super Bowl host city make it an ideal setting for traffickers of underage prostitutes, Allen says.

Each year, 100,000 to 300,000 American kids, some as young as 12 years old, are exploited in the sex trade, he says. The traffickers use the Super Bowl and other large events to ply their trade, Allen says. "The traffickers try to seize that opportunity to do business," he says.

Incidents at previous Super Bowls:

► Two Florida men were convicted last year on federal charges for using the Craigs-

list website to subject a 14-year-old girl to prostitution during the 2009 Super Bowl in Tampa, according to the Justice Department.

► During last year's Super Bowl in Miami, child advocacy group Klaas Kids Foundation and Miami-based Kristi House identified at least 16 out-of-town underage prostitutes working the streets and hotels of South Beach and other Miami-area neighborhoods.

► A Hawaii man was recently convicted of flying in a 17-year-old girl from Hawaii to a South Beach hotel for prostitution during last year's Super Bowl, Miami-Dade Police Sgt. Nicole Donnelly says.

Miami-Dade police and federal agents organized the Minor Vice Task Force and launched a series of under-

cover stings targeting underage sex rings during last year's Super Bowl week, which included the Pro Bowl, Donnelly says.

"With the Super Bowl and Pro Bowl, we had a lot of juveniles recovered last year, more than previous years," she says.

Super Bowl XLV on Sunday in Cowboys Stadium is of particular concern because of Texas' 1,200-mile border with Mexico, which makes the state a bigger target for international rings, Abbott says. Agents are monitoring websites for signs of underage sex offerings and launching undercover investigations in the region, he says.

"We are watching them, we will find them, and we will prosecute them," Abbott says.