

More than 100 people arrested during Operation FALCON

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By John Hollenhorst

It's one of the biggest roundups of bad guys ever in Utah history. Over the last week, cops fanned out all across the state, busting suspects on felony warrants ranging from shoplifting to murder.

They call it Operation FALCON (Federal and Local Cops Organized Nationally). In all, 35 law enforcement agencies around the state played a role in taking down 161 suspects.

This is the fourth year for Operation Falcon, and it looks to be the most successful arrest crackdown yet.

There were no injuries and no significant violence, which is a pretty good outcome considering the kind of people they went after.



Cops moved in on houses over the last week in dozens of towns and cities around the state. They executed 201 felony warrants and put the cuffs on 161 accused felons. Chief Deputy U.S. Marshal James Thompson said, "Unfortunately, there's an endless supply of felony warrants that are outstanding."

The warrants were for a hodgepodge of crimes ranging from relatively minor credit card fraud and shoplifting, to drug charges and even homicide. Thompson said, "Our targeted group was more violent offenders, gang members and sex offenses."

This is the fourth and largest crackdown of its kind in the last four years. Our news camera went along as the arrest teams moved in. Spearheaded by the U.S. Marshals Office, the effort involved agencies at every level of government: local, county, state and federal.



They did shoe-leather investigations to figure out where the suspects were and then moved in with force, 10 cops for every crook to reduce the possibility of violence. "When we go out in large teams, we try to overwhelm them with numbers, so we try to minimize that," Thompson said.

Bystanders were often surprised to see so many cops. One officer told a bystander, "The reason we bring these kinds of numbers is, it's an officer safety thing, and it's better for them. They're less likely to fight."

Cops say it's what they do every day, just more intensive than usual. And there's always the frustration that many of the suspects they bust will be quickly released to go back to the streets. One officer told Eyewitness News, "You know, we turn around and there they are, and we're doing the same old thing again."

Nevertheless, the U.S. Marshal's Office, based at the federal courthouse, says the streets are safer after an operation like this.

They do target the most violent suspects. And the more serious the crime, the more likely the suspects are to actually stay behind bars.

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