

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Home Depot A/C Thefts Lead to Two Arrests, Traffic Stop and Police Pursuit

Two men face grand larceny charges after separate reports that air-conditioning units were stolen from Home Depot on St. Croix, with one suspect stopped in a pickup and another detained after police pursued a black SUV through several communities Monday.

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From left to right, mugshots of Joannes Francois and Elroy Tonge. By. THE VIRGIN ISLANDS POLICE DEPARTMENT.

ST. CROIX — Two men have been charged following separate reports that air-conditioning units were stolen from Home Depot on Monday, with one arrest occurring

after police stopped a pickup carrying the merchandise and the other following a vehicle pursuit through several communities.

Elroy Tonge was charged with grand larceny and possession of stolen property. Joannes Francois was charged with grand larceny and disobeying the orders of a police officer.

Magistrate Yolan Brow Ross found probable cause Tuesday to uphold the charges against both men.

Pickup Stopped With Air-Conditioning Units

Police were first alerted Monday afternoon after Home Depot employees called 911 to report that two suspects had stolen several air-conditioning units.

One report identified an older-model Toyota pickup as the vehicle used to load the merchandise and transport it from the store.

Officers later conducted a traffic stop on a vehicle matching the description supplied by employees.

The driver, Tonge, told police that a man he identified as "Mr. Joel" had asked him to assist with collecting items from Home Depot. Mr. Tonge said the man offered him \$100 for the help, and he agreed.

After the air-conditioning units were loaded into the truck bed, the two men drove away, according to Tonge.

He told police that "Mr. Joel" asked to be dropped off at the Clifton Hill traffic light on the Melvin Evans Highway and instructed him to meet later at the Mon Bijou dump site.

Tonge maintained that he never entered Home Depot. Surveillance photographs supplied by store employees, however, reportedly showed him leaving the business.

Police said the images also showed the man identified as "Mr. Joel" exiting the store while pushing a shopping cart containing the air-conditioning units.

Tonge was subsequently arrested and charged.

Second Report Leads to Vehicle Pursuit

More than an hour after the initial police broadcast, the 911 Emergency Call Center notified officers of another reported theft involving several air-conditioning units from Home Depot.

While traveling to the store, responding officers saw two men near AutoZone loading split air-conditioning units into the trunk of a black Acura SUV.

When police approached, the men fled with the vehicle's trunk still open.

Officers pursued the SUV but lost sight of it when it entered the Sunny Acres community. They later saw it traveling west toward Barren Spot but again lost track of the vehicle.

Another officer subsequently reported that the suspects had run into a structure in Estate Glynn described by police as an old crack house. The black SUV was found abandoned nearby.

Police detained Joannes Francois at the scene. Officers identified him as the same man they had seen placing an air-conditioning unit into the SUV near AutoZone.

He was arrested and charged with grand larceny and disobeying the orders of a police officer.

Both men were remanded into custody pending advice-of-rights hearings scheduled for Tuesday.

A bail hearing for Tonge was scheduled for Wednesday morning.

Francois was ordered to pay \$1,600 in cash to secure his release, with the remainder of his \$20,000 bail requirement posted as an unsecured bond.

He must also observe a curfew from 6:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. and comply with all other standard bail conditions.

Francois is scheduled to return to court on July 29.