Brothers arrested in food stamp fraud case

Thursday, May 12, 2011
Two brothers were arrested on Wednesday for a food stamp scam that's becoming a widespread problem for law enforcement, taxpayers, and the local business community.

Abdo Zamzami, 38, and Safwan Zamzami, 24, were arrested by the Caddo Sheriff's Special Investigations Section and the Louisiana State Police after Abdo paid a food stamp recipient $70 for a $130 benefits card. The brothers then used the card to purchase soft drinks at a local grocery store to stock the shelves of a local mini-mart where Abdo is a clerk.

Abdo was arrested for unauthorized use of an access card and computer fraud. Safwan was arrested for being a principle to computer fraud. Both were booked into the Caddo Correctional Center. The investigation is continuing and more arrests are expected.

Caddo Sheriff Steve Prator said his office began investigating complaints of widespread abuse of the state's food assistance program for low income residents after receiving complaints from local store managers about questionable purchases made with food stamp benefits cards. Managers said they see systematic abuse on a weekly basis, especially by people buying goods in bulk, like the soft drinks in the Zamzami case.

Prator said the benefits cards are sold illegally for about 60 cents on the dollar. People who receive the cash often use the money to purchase other prohibited items, like alcohol or drugs.

In 2010, Louisiana dispersed $1.2 billion in food assistance and is expected to surpass that in 2011.