



CRIMINAL ENTREPRENEURS TAKING FULL ADVANTAGE OF INCREASING FUEL PRICES

A phenomenon has recently come to the attention of the law enforcement community on both sides of the New York and New Jersey state lines. In February 2008, the New Jersey Regional Operations Intelligence Center reported that in December 2007 a charter bus was observed at a local New Jersey gas station, pumping diesel fuel through an open window. There did not appear to be any irregularities with the exterior of the bus. However, further investigation revealed that the seats had been removed in order to accommodate 18, 55-gallon drums. The drums managed to hold 300 gallons of diesel fuel.

The goal of this operation was to pump the fuel in New Jersey at a cheaper price per gallon, then drive to New York City, where gas prices are higher, and sell the fuel for a profit. Outside of the numerous violations involved in an act such as this one, the fact that the bus is now carrying 300 gallons of diesel fuel creates a hazmat concern. Whether it is the intent of the criminal or not, modifications such as this could create an inconspicuous vehicle borne improvised explosive device (VBIED).

Continued increase in fuel prices will keep these criminals eager to modify their systems in order to stay below the radar. Typically, charter buses are not identified as a target for commercial vehicle stops, making this type of vehicle ideal for transportation. However, similar modifications can be made to just about any passenger vehicle as well. Traffic patrols and commercial vehicle enforcement teams are reminded to exercise caution and remain vigilant when approaching all vehicles.

Fire and Rescue services are also cautioned should one of these converted vehicles be encountered at a motor vehicle accident, vehicle fire, or other emergency.



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