

# Q&A: Dallas police step up anti-prostitution efforts

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By STEVE THOMPSON / The Dallas Morning News  
stevethompson@dallasnews.com

This month, the Dallas city attorney's office obtained an emergency order to shut down a northwest Dallas massage parlor accused of housing a prostitution ring involving underage girls.

The Golden Flower spa was the fifth massage parlor shut down this year, according to Dallas police. And while the others did not employ juveniles, police say prostitution in such businesses is a problem that has grown within the past year.

"Where we started out with one or two locations here and there, they started blossoming," says vice squad Lt. Christina Smith. "We have a couple of areas in northwest Dallas where there are just multiple massage parlors within a couple of blocks of each other."

Police say they have stepped up enforcement. This past week, Smith agreed to sit down for some questions about the effort.

## **Why is this a problem for Dallas?**

We do get complaints from citizens, as well as surrounding businesses, that they don't want this illegal activity in their neighborhoods. Prostitution is illegal, and we have women that are being prostituted. So this is a problem not just for the surrounding neighborhoods, but actually for the people that work in these locations. And because it is a criminal enterprise, there's a possibility that there are other crimes that could take place that could jeopardize the safety of the people that are there.

## **When you suspect that there is prostitution in one of these businesses, what do you do to confirm that?**

Without going into a lot of detail about our undercover operations, we do send undercover officers in. We talk to these women. They agree to a sex act for a fee, and the agreement is all that is needed to legally make a prostitution case.

## **Is there something new about what Dallas police are doing?**

What we've done is we've started coordinating with building inspections and code enforcement and the city attorney's office, so in addition to looking at the criminal aspect of these businesses, we're also looking at them from a permit perspective, because businesses have to obtain a certificate of occupancy in order to open any type of business in the city. A lot of these certificates of occupancy were obtained with incorrect or false information.

## **Why do they need to put down false information in applying for certificates of occupancy?**

There are different types of certificates of occupancy depending on what type of business you're going to open. So when you open a legitimate massage parlor or spa, then there's a certain type of certificate of occupancy that you get for that. However, these people don't have the credentials to get that, so they try to go a different route.

## **Then why don't they get the credentials – the massage licenses?**

The massage licenses are obtained through the Texas Department of State Health Services, and it's quite a rigorous program to get licensed. There are hundreds of hours of school that you have to go through, exams that you have to take, so it would be quite difficult for a business of this type to be able to legally

obtain one.

**Anything you'd like to add?**

We are looking to shut these businesses down, and we'll be watching if they try to reopen elsewhere. So our advice to them is to look outside of the city of Dallas.