Police: False rape reports cause fear, cost public money, hinder real victims

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Concerned about three recent false rape allegations, Orlando police cautioned residents that lying wastes money, time and keeps real victims from reporting true crimes.

"We want victims to continue to report crimes, but we want real victims," Sgt. Art Eld of the Orlando Police Department's sex crimes division said at a press conference today. "We don't want to spend useful resources chasing ghosts."

Filing false rape reports stirs unnecessary fear in the community, wastes thousands of public dollars and keeps real victims from telling their stories, he said.

Police officials made their plea public Tuesday, a day after 18-year-old Samaria Renford claimed three masked men raped her Monday in Rosemont.

She is the third woman in the past two months to have reported a rape to Orlando police and then recanted, saying they made up the allegation.

Renford acknowledged her false report, telling detectives she "fabricated the incident because she found her boyfriend cheating on her," a police report states. She "hoped that if he discovered she was raped he would take her back and be nicer to her."

Police booked Renford on charges of filing a false police report. Although she paid $500 bail on the charge, she is being held at the Orange County Jail on an outstanding warrant for fraudulent use of a credit card in 2008.

She will be transported to the juvenile detention center, jail spokesman Allen Moore said.

The leader of the Florida Council Against Sexual Violence acknowledged that false rape reports make it hard for those who are real victims and also harder for police and others who serve victims.

But Jennifer Dritt said police drawing attention to the false reports doesn't help, either.

"Ninety-two, 98 percent of [rape] reports are truthful, real," said Dritt, executive director of FCASV, which is based in Tallahassee. "That's not necessarily any more true than for a case of, say, insurance fraud or burglary. And it makes victims even less inclined to come forward.

"It also contributes to the myth that women falsify the rape when they don't."

The other two recent cases of false rape reports panicked residents living in downtown Orlando because the women said the attacks happened in popular nighttime spots or areas known as havens for runners, walkers and families.

Luisa Martinez told police on June 13 that a man raped her off Pine Street in downtown Orlando. She made up the story and also faces charges of filing a false report and perjury, according to an arrest warrant.
Investigators said Lizze Hunter told police on May 14 that a man raped her near the bird fountain at Lake Eola Park. She even gave them a description of a man.

Police later learned the description was that of a homeless man Hunter had seen earlier.

Police said incidents like those are what they want to avoid because of the man power spent working the cases and the possible chilling effect it can have on real rape victims.

"Thousands of dollars are spent on these cases," Eld said.

Dozens of officers, investigators, sketch artists and other officials spend time gathering evidence and leads and dispersing information to the public to catch suspects. Nurses, victim's advocates and other emergency workers also tend to the alleged victims costing the city more money.

But the costliest impact is the effect it has on real victims who already are afraid to tell their accounts to authorities for fear they will not be believed.

"It makes it tougher for the victim to come talk to us and we don't want that," Eld said. "We're going to believe the victim until we have reason not to [believe]."

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