

SEX TRAFFICKING AT TRUCK STOPS

This document provides a brief overview of the presence of sex trafficking at commercially-operated truck stops as well as state-operated rest areas and welcome centers in the United States. The document is intended to provide a basic understanding of this issue and should not be viewed as exhaustive. It is also important to note that although sex trafficking and prostitution occurs at these locations, not all truckers or travelers purchase commercial sex. Anti-trafficking trucking organizations and truckers themselves often play an important role in alerting law enforcement to the presence of sex trafficking at truck stops.

SEX TRAFFICKING

Sex trafficking involves the use of force, fraud, or coercion to compel a person to engage in commercial sex acts against his/her will. It is a form of modern-day slavery and is occurring around the United States, including within the trucking and transportation industry. Under federal law, any minor under the age of 18 years induced into commercial sex is a victim of sex trafficking—regardless if the trafficker used force, fraud, or coercion.

AN OVERVIEW OF SEX TRAFFICKING AT TRUCK STOPS

Sex trafficking can be present at commercially-operated truck stops as well as state-operated rest areas and welcome centers due to their remote locations and the dominant male-customer base that use the facilities. These locations are often insulated from local communities, making it a convenient place for transient customers to purchase sex with minimal concerns of detection. Because these locations are also geographically isolated, it is difficult for victims to leave their situations and allows traffickers to quickly and frequently move victims without interference or undue attention. Additionally, traffickers reap significant profits by making commercial sex accessible to a customer base of male truckers and travelers willing to pay.



Source: Microsoft

Two particular forms of sex trafficking that have been identified as operating out of truck stops include pimp-controlled sex trafficking and brothels fronting as licensed massage parlors. Pimp-controlled sex trafficking typically involves traffickers or “pimps” who compel women and/or children into commercial sex where they may use truck stops as an exclusive marketplace or one of many venues to maximize profits. These traffickers often require their victims to meet a daily quota of earnings or face unwanted or potentially violent consequences. The victims are often U.S. citizens who come from diverse backgrounds. Illicit massage parlors often prey on Asian women with promises of good jobs, and instead compel them into commercial sex through a well-developed system of debt bondage. Many of these women are often isolated due to language and cultural barriers. For additional information about these forms of sex trafficking, please refer to additional At-A-Glance documents located at www.polarisproject.org/resources/resources-by-topic.

CHARACTERISTICS OF SEX TRAFFICKING AT TRUCK STOPS

- **Venues** – While sex trafficking occurs at state-operated rest areas and welcome centers, it is most often prevalent in commercially-operated truck stops where truckers are offered more privacy and access to more amenities such as dining, lodging, and entertainment. Moreover, law enforcement is not as present in these locations unless responding to complaints or incidents.
- **Customers** – The majority of customers are transient male truckers and travelers often on the road for long periods of time—making them an ideal customer in search of companionship and/or commercial sex. With the presence of a commercial front brothel or massage parlor, customers can also be from the local communities near where the truck stops are located. Customers seeking commercial sex can search online advertisements (e.g. escort services) while at a truck stop. Customers can also signal their interest for sex by responding to broadcasts offering “commercial company” over the Citizen Band (CB) radio or by flashing their truck headlights at women or children walking the tarmac (parking lot).

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- **Advertisement** – Sex trafficking victims are often coerced by their trafficker to solicit customers by means of advertising over CB radio, knocking on truck cab doors, walking up and down the tarmac, or directly approaching and offering services to men. Massage parlors and commercial front brothels also advertise by posting large billboards along the highway that encourage truckers to visit their locations. In pimp-controlled situations, the traffickers are not always visible and may wait at nearby motels while their victims are engaging in prostitution.
- **Commercial Sex Acts** – Commercial sex often occurs in various locations such as in truck cabs, at nearby motels or private residences, in customers' vehicles, or at other venues selected by customers. Pricing for commercial sex varies based on types of sex acts, use or lack of use of protection, geographic location, etc. Prices at truck stops typically range from \$25-\$100 per sex act.
- **Perpetration of Other Crimes** – In addition to engaging in commercial sex, sex trafficking victims may be required by their traffickers to engage or facilitate other crimes such as cargo theft, petty theft (e.g. wallets or personal items), identity theft, or selling and/or transporting illegal narcotics or other contraband.



Source: Polaris Project

VULNERABILITIES AND MEANS OF CONTROL

- **At-Risk, Runaway, Throwaway, and Homeless Youth** – This population is at extreme risk for commercial sexual exploitation and human trafficking. They may be more likely to engage in survival sex in order to get basic necessities such as shelter and food—or in other cases, exchange sex for transportation. For more information on runaway and homeless youth intersections with human trafficking, please visit <http://www.polarisproject.org/resources/resources-by-topic/intersections-with-other-issues>.
- **Sexual and Physical Assault** – Individuals engaging in commercial sex are often at high risk of sexual and physical violence from both customers as well as traffickers. The victims are often reluctant to call law enforcement to report the crimes due to their fears of arrest for prostitution.
- **Frequent Movement** – Traffickers often move victims to different locations in order to attract customers as well as avoid law enforcement detection and maximize profits. Within massage parlor or commercial front brothel networks, victims are often rotated every few weeks to other cities/venues in order to provide fresh faces to their customers. Because the victims are frequently moved, it makes it difficult for them to establish relationships or seek assistance.
- **Public Indifference and/or Lack of Awareness** – The continued perception that prostitution is always a voluntary, victimless crime, and those who engage in it are viewed negatively makes it difficult for victims to come forward due to this stigma. Moreover, most truckers and truck stop operators often treat these individuals as nuisances—often referring to them in derogatory terms such as “lot lizards.” Much of this has to do with limited to no awareness about sex trafficking and its presence at these locations.
- **Misidentification by Law Enforcement** – When encountered by law enforcement, sex trafficking victims often provide canned or false stories provided by their traffickers. The victims often deny they have a pimp and claim they are voluntarily engaging in commercial sex to earn quick money. Coupled with a lack of training on human trafficking, law enforcement often treats these individuals as criminals rather than victims of a crime. In many situations, traffickers and customers are often not arrested or given minimal punishments compared to those received by their victims.



Source: Microsoft

RELEVANT STATISTICS FROM THE NATIONAL HUMAN TRAFFICKING RESOURCE CENTER HOTLINE

In 2011, the National Human Trafficking Resource Center (NHTRC) received 185 calls from callers who self-identified as truckers. Over 50% of those calls referenced human trafficking tips or crisis cases. The NHTRC also received reports about 79 unique cases of potential human trafficking at truck stops in 2011. The most common way callers learned of the NHTRC was through Truckers Against Trafficking.

COMMON TERMS USED AT TRUCK STOPS REFERENCING COMMERCIAL SEX

Term(s)	Meaning
Commercial company, company, date, bunk bunny, highway hostess, parking lot hostess, lot lizard, road ho, road Juliet, dress for sale, free ride, little bit, pavement princess, professional beaver, trick babe	Women or girls engaging in commercial sex at truck stop locations
Buffalo, lot lord, good buddy	Men or boys engaging in commercial sex (particularly with males)
Apartment, home twenty, home port	Trucker's cab or an actual physical location
Party row	Location at a truck stop where truckers park for commercial sex
Honey, green stamps, lettuce	Money or cost for commercial sex
Ears, ears on, got your ears on?, I'm all ears	Referring to the CB radio
Nap trap, pickle park	Place to sleep, motel, or rest area
Truck stop hook up, beaver patrol	A sexual encounter and/or purchasing commercial sex
Truck Stop Tommy	Individual providing drugs or other illegal services (prostitution)
Bear, black'n white, boy scouts, cub scouts, jack rabbit, Johnny law	Law enforcement

RELEVANT HUMAN TRAFFICKING LAWS

- **Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA) of 2000** enacted new federal laws that defined and criminalized human trafficking and established victim protections in the United States. It was reauthorized in 2003, 2005, and 2008. For more information, please visit <http://www.polarisproject.org/resources/state-and-federal-laws>.
- **49 U.S. States and Washington DC** have enacted state-level laws that criminalize human trafficking. As of March 2012, the only state without a law is Wyoming.

SEX TRAFFICKING CASES AND VIGNETTES REFERENCING TRUCK STOPS

- **U.S. vs. Scott (2004):** S.H. ran away from home at age 13 and, while on the street, was approached by Scott in a car with another woman in it. The two invited her into their car, offering her access to drugs and alcohol as well as claiming they would take her to a party. The individuals told S.H. they were going to Oklahoma City, but instead took her to Amarillo, Texas. Upon arriving, they informed S.H. that she would have to engage in prostitution at truck stops. S.H. was required to bring in a nightly quota of \$500-\$1,000 and work from 9pm to 3am. Scott pled guilty to transporting a minor for prostitution and was sentenced to 120 months in prisons.¹
- **NHTRC Call Vignette:** A truck driver contacted the NHTRC to report a situation involving several young girls. A few days previously the truck driver had been at a truck stop in Arkansas, and had observed three teenage girls offering commercial sex. The trucker was not sure about their exact ages, but thought that they looked very young. In the past, the trucker had observed women at this particular truck stop offering commercial sex, but this was the first time she had seen anyone this young. She had noticed that all of the young girls were picked up by the same van in the morning, which she found suspicious. The NHTRC contacted a federal law enforcement taskforce that works specifically on cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children and provided them with information about the truck stop.
- **Stormy Nights** was a large-scale federal sex trafficking of children investigation targeting truck stops and call services nationwide, but primarily in the Oklahoma City area. The operation resulted in over nine individuals being convicted of multiple federal offenses related to child sex trafficking, transportation of minors with the intent to engage in criminal sexual activity, etc. The individuals' sentences to prison ranged in length to up to 17.5 years.²

Polaris Project works to empower and mobilize people from diverse backgrounds and of all ages to take meaningful action against human trafficking. Register with www.polarisproject.org/signup to receive regular updates on human trafficking in the United States.

¹ University of Michigan, Human Trafficking Database, <http://www.law.umich.edu/clinical/HuTrafficCases/Pages/CaseDisp.aspx?caseID=61>

² Federal Bureau of Investigations, Innocence Lost Case Summaries, http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/investigate/vc_majorthefts/cac/innocencelost/innocence-lost-cases