

Metro uses dogs to search safes

By Harold Hyman
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Armed with search warrants and two dope sniffing dogs, Metro Police opened dozens of lock boxes at Western Vault Corp., 2929 S. Maryland Parkway, but failed to find several pounds of cocaine that had been stolen from their own lock box there, it was disclosed Wednesday.

The exhaustive search, in which many of the suspect lock boxes had to be drilled open by a locksmith, was conducted from 1:30 p.m. to 11 p.m. on Tuesday, according to Metro chief of detectives Jerry Cunningham.

Cunningham is leading the investigation personally and was present when the locks boxes were opened.

"We found no narcotics. We still have a lot of leads that we are pursuing, Cunningham said, but indicated nothing came of the vault search.

Metro undercover officers had kept between two and four kilos of cocaine, plus \$300,000 in travelers checks, in the lock box they had rented at the commercial public vault, but discovered the box empty Feb. 7.

After questioning the undercover officers who had access to the lock box, and reportedly satisfied they were not involved in the theft, Metro investigators focused on vault company employees who also had keys.

They were said to have assumed that if vault company employees were involved, they would not risk removing the stolen cocaine but would keep it under lock and key on the premises, at least temporarily until the investigation cooled.

A search warrant for all empty lock boxes in the vault was obtained and two dogs trained to detect drugs were used to indicate which boxes to open.