



City of Coalinga

Police Department

Michael Salvador, Chief of Police

270 N. Sixth St.
Coalinga, CA 93210
Phone: (559) 935-1525
Fax: (559) 935-1756
E-Mail: police@coalinga.com

PRESS RELEASE

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Prepared By/Contact Person: Darren Blevins, Police Commander

GAS THEFT LEADS TO SUSPECT VEHICLE GOING OVER 40 FOOT EMBANKMENT

On Sunday February 17, 2019 at around 1:53 am, the Coalinga Police Department received a call of suspicious circumstances in the area of Janay Court. and San Benito Street. The reporting party advised there was a smell of gas along with portable gas containers near a vehicle. The city has been experiencing a rash theft where the suspect(s) drill a hole in the bottom of a vehicle's gas tank and then steal the fuel. This information has been posted on social media advising citizens to be aware and on the lookout for such suspicious activity.

The concerned citizen saw two subjects under a vehicle who were in the process of stealing gas from a vehicle and realized they had been spotted. The two subjects got into a white 2011 Dodge SUV and fled out of the area heading eastbound on Phelps Avenue. The citizen followed the suspect vehicle awaiting arrival of responding police units. The citizen was on the phone with police dispatch when the Dodge went off the road and disappeared over an embankment and in to the Arroyo Pasajero Creek.

Responding officers arrived 45 seconds to a minute after the SUV had crashed. As the officers arrived on scene the noticed the SUV went off the right side of the roadway through a barbed wire fence and traveled approximately 60-foot through a field and over a 40-foot embankment into the flowing creek down below. Because of the angle and degree of the drop off and unknown level of the creek, police personnel were unable to get to the occupants of the vehicle.

Officers on scene were able to communicate with the driver who was partially pinned in the vehicle but was conscious. The Coalinga Fire Department along with the Fresno County Fire & Rescue were called to extract the subjects from the SUV. Rescue efforts took nearly 3 hours to get both subjects from inside the vehicle into waiting ambulances. The driver's identity is unconfirmed at this time as he provided first responders with various names. The passenger was identified as a 15-year-old male juvenile and a Coalinga resident. Both occupants sustained sever to major injuries and were transported to the hospital for treatment.

The California Highway Patrol was called to investigate the crash as it occurred outside the city of Coalinga. The Coalinga Police Department is investigating the theft and will be conducting follow up interviews with the two occupants as well as filing charges against both of them with the Fresno County District Attorney's Office.