

## Officials raid car lot in Socorro

By **Adriana M. Chávez** \ El Paso Times

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A Lower Valley car lot was raided by officials from the El Paso County Tax Assessor-Collector's Office on Friday as part of a crackdown on illegal car lots.

Tax officials visited Holguin Cars, 9987 Alameda in Socorro, after receiving reports that the lot might have been operating without a license.

The lot's owner, Ernesto Holguin Molina, denied the allegation and told officials he is a state-licensed car dealer. He declined to comment to news reporters on Friday, minutes after his lot was raided.

Sergio Garcia, the enforcement director for the county tax office, said officials received information from Socorro residents that Holguin might have been participating in "curbstoning," or illegally selling vehicles near a public roadway, in a public or private parking lot or on an empty lot.

When officials arrived at the lot late Friday morning, several vehicles on sale still had their original license plates attached. Garcia said all cars sold on a car lot must have dealer plates.

The lot also doesn't have a building with a phone line or a sign with the lot's name on it, which are all requirements for a licensed car lot to operate in Texas.

Holguin told officials he is a licensed dealer in Texas but, according to county and state databases, the lot isn't listed as such, Garcia said.

Holguin also couldn't immediately provide county officials the titles of the vehicles he has for sale.

"Even if he were to have a license, he's still violating a couple of codes,"

Garcia said.

If Holguin isn't a licensed car dealer, Garcia said, he faces fines of up to \$5,000 if a judge determines he violated Texas' curbstoning law.

"If he's doing everything legally, then he can keep on going," Garcia said.

County residents who want to report possibly illegal car sales are asked to call the El Paso County Tax Assessor-Collector Enforcement Division at 755-3535.

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