

WASTEBOOK

THE FARCE AWAKENS

75

SUSPICIOUS BAR COASTERS

Maryland
Department of Homeland Security
\$2.5 MILLION

A bar or pub without suspicious behavior would be, well, kinda suspicious.

Regardless, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is distributing drink coasters at some bars in the Washington, D.C. area, proclaiming “IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING,” urging bar patrons to report anything that may seem suspicious.¹⁰⁴⁹ Nowhere on the coaster, however, is a phone number provided to actually make a report.

An employee at a popular Irish bar in the nation’s capital notes “every now and again we have an occasional purse snatcher, patron walk out on their tab, or unruly European soccer fan.” But he says “as far as acts of terrorism inside an Irish pub, I cannot seem to recall witnessing any in my years of employment—nor anyone reading a coaster.”¹⁰⁵⁰

What was highly suspicious to the bar employee was the small print on the coaster: “Purchased with funds provided by the US Department of Homeland Security.”¹⁰⁵¹

Even more suspicious, when asked about the funding for the coasters, DHS largely evaded the questions. The non-partisan Congressional Research Service said it “didn’t get direct answers” about the funding of the project.¹⁰⁵²

What was revealed is that the drink coasters are part of the “See Something, Say Something” campaign in the National Capital Region. The Maryland Transportation Administration (MTA) received \$2.5 million from the Transit Security Grant Program (TSGP) to

WASTEBOOK

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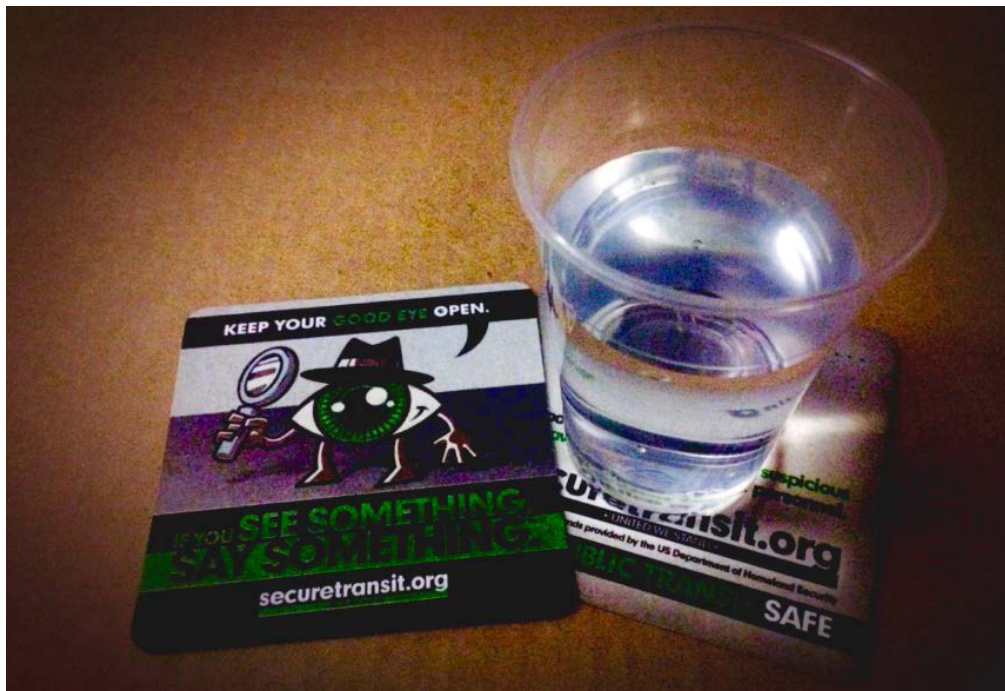
pay for the bar coasters beginning in Fiscal Year 2012.¹⁰⁵³ The funds also paid for the purchases of website domain name, www.securetransit.org, and “marketing materials carrying the ‘See Something Say, Something’ campaign logo and messaging, as well as additional materials and outreach and public awareness efforts to include awareness materials.”¹⁰⁵⁴

One side of the coaster features a cartoon eyeball—with two arms and legs, wearing a detective’s hat and holding a magnifying glass—saying “KEEP YOUR GOOD EYE OPEN.” The flip side has a picture of a duffel bag and urges “report unattended bags and suspicious behavior to police and transit personnel.” No phone number or contact information other than a web link is provided to call to make a report.

A giant banner with similar graphics and messaging was spotted at the Tysons Corner shopping mall in Fairfax, Virginia, this summer.¹⁰⁵⁵

TSGP’s total available funding in 2015 is \$87 million.¹⁰⁵⁶ The program, administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), is “one of the Department’s grant programs that directly support transportation infrastructure security activities.”¹⁰⁵⁷

It is difficult for anyone—even a patron in a dimly lit bar—to see how drink coasters and banners at shopping malls “directly support transportation infrastructure security activities.”



DHS’s “IF YOU SEE SOMETHING, SAY SOMETHING” bar coasters did not provide a phone number to call to report suspicious behavior and are difficult to read in a dimly lit setting.

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- ¹⁰⁴⁵ Lisa Rein, “Almost 100 Homeland Security employees have been paid to stay home for over a year,” Washington Post, October 22, 2015; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/federal-eye/wp/2015/10/22/at-homeland-security-almost-100-employees-paid-to-stay-home-for-more-than-a-year/> .
- ¹⁰⁴⁶ Lisa Rein, “Almost 100 Homeland Security employees have been paid to stay home for over a year,” Washington Post, October 22, 2015; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/federal-eye/wp/2015/10/22/at-homeland-security-almost-100-employees-paid-to-stay-home-for-more-than-a-year/> .
- ¹⁰⁴⁷ Lisa Rein, “More than 2,500 VA employees were on paid leave last year. The VA hasn’t tracked why,” Washington Post, October 30, 2015; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/federal-eye/wp/2015/10/30/more-than-2500-va-employees-were-on-paid-leave-last-year-the-va-hasnt-tracked-why/> .
- ¹⁰⁴⁸ Lisa Rein, “Almost 100 Homeland Security employees have been paid to stay home for over a year,” Washington Post, October 22, 2015; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/federal-eye/wp/2015/10/22/at-homeland-security-almost-100-employees-paid-to-stay-home-for-more-than-a-year/> .
- ¹⁰⁴⁹ As printed on the securetransit.org drink coaster.
- ¹⁰⁵⁰ Interview with an employee of a Washington, DC Irish pub who asked to remain anonymous, September 14, 2015.
- ¹⁰⁵¹ As printed on the securetransit.org drink coaster.
- ¹⁰⁵² Information provided by the Congressional Research Service, September 10, 2015.
- ¹⁰⁵³ Information provided by the Congressional Research Service, September 10, 2015.
- ¹⁰⁵⁴ Information provided by the Congressional Research Service, September 10, 2015.
- ¹⁰⁵⁵ Eyewitness report from Tysons Corner shopping mall, June 30, 2015.
- ¹⁰⁵⁶ “Fiscal Year 2015 Transit Security Grant Program,” FEMA website, accessed September 15, 2015; <http://www.fema.gov/fiscal-year-2015-transit-security-grant-program> .
- ¹⁰⁵⁷ “Fiscal Year 2015 Transit Security Grant Program,” FEMA website, accessed September 15, 2015; <http://www.fema.gov/fiscal-year-2015-transit-security-grant-program> .
- ¹⁰⁵⁸ Matthew Guzdial, Brent Harrison, Boyang Li, and Mark O. Riedl, “Crowdsourcing Open Interactive Narrative,” School of Interactive Computing Georgia Institute of Technology website, presented at the 2015 Foundations of Digital Games Conference in Pacific Grove, California; <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~riedl/pubs/guzdial-fdg15.pdf> .
- ¹⁰⁵⁹ “CAREER: Combining Crowdsourcing and Computational Creativity to Enable Narrative Generation for Education, Training, and Healthcare,” Award abstract #1350339, National Science Foundation on-line database, accessed September 21, 2015; http://nsf.gov/awardsearch/showAward?AWD_ID=1350339 .
- ¹⁰⁶⁰ “Georgia Tech Uses Artificial Intelligence to Crowdfund Interactive Fiction,” Georgia Institute of Technology News Center, September 1, 2015; <http://www.news.gatech.edu/2015/09/01/georgia-tech-uses-artificial-intelligence-crowdfund-interactive-fiction> .
- ¹⁰⁶¹ “Georgia Tech Uses Artificial Intelligence to Crowdfund Interactive Fiction,” Georgia Institute of Technology News Center, September 1, 2015; <http://www.news.gatech.edu/2015/09/01/georgia-tech-uses-artificial-intelligence-crowdfund-interactive-fiction> .
- ¹⁰⁶² “Georgia Tech Uses Artificial Intelligence to Crowdfund Interactive Fiction,” Georgia Institute of Technology News Center, September 1, 2015; <http://www.news.gatech.edu/2015/09/01/georgia-tech-uses-artificial-intelligence-crowdfund-interactive-fiction> .
- ¹⁰⁶³ “Georgia Tech Uses Artificial Intelligence to Crowdfund Interactive Fiction,” Georgia Institute of Technology News Center, September 1, 2015; <http://www.news.gatech.edu/2015/09/01/georgia-tech-uses-artificial-intelligence-crowdfund-interactive-fiction> .
- ¹⁰⁶⁴ Matthew Guzdial, Brent Harrison, Boyang Li, and Mark O. Riedl, “Crowdsourcing Open Interactive Narrative,” School of Interactive Computing Georgia Institute of Technology website, presented at the 2015 Foundations of Digital Games Conference in Pacific Grove, California; <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~riedl/pubs/guzdial-fdg15.pdf> .
- ¹⁰⁶⁵ “Georgia Tech Uses Artificial Intelligence to Crowdfund Interactive Fiction,” Georgia Institute of Technology News Center, September 1, 2015; <http://www.news.gatech.edu/2015/09/01/georgia-tech-uses-artificial-intelligence-crowdfund-interactive-fiction> .