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## **Authorities: Smuggling rings defrauded Mich. bottle deposit fund**

*BY JOE SWICKARD FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER*

A get-rich scheme played for laughs on classic primetime TV was run for real, authorities said today, in announcing the break-up of an alleged racket that cashed in big time on Michigan's bottle deposit law.

Fifteen people in Michigan and Ohio - the alleged smugglers as well as merchants - were charged in felony warrants with bundling millions of out-of-state cans and redeeming them for the dime-apiece deposit in Michigan. State, local and federal agents arrested at least 13 suspects and seized more than \$500,000.

“A half-million in cash is not ‘Seinfeld,’” said Matt Frendewey, spokesman for the Michigan Attorney General, referring to an episode of the comedy show with a similar theme.

Investigators alleged that millions of foreign cans were collected, crushed and packaged in plastic bags approved for packaging and sold at a discount to Michigan merchants who then redeemed them. The state pays bulk redemption by weight.