

# Operation Fight the Blight targets area near USF



Jorge Cermeno, an electricity theft investigator with the Tampa Electric Co., pulls an electric meter today from an abandoned apartment on East 136th Street at North 20th Street as part of Operation Fight the Blight.

By LENORA LAKE | Tribune correspondent  
Published: November 03, 2011

## UNIVERSITY AREA --

Hillsborough County code enforcement officers, Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office deputies and Tampa Electric Co. investigators fanned out today throughout the area west of the University of South Florida to start Operation Fight the Blight.



Officers also worked with residents to clean up trash and debris, and paint over graffiti. The cleanup effort, continuing through Nov. 16, is to reduce crime and create a safer environment in the low-income area with numerous abandoned and dilapidated apartment complexes and homes.

The teams will secure buildings, look for criminal activity, paint over graffiti, remove trash, cut back low-hanging branches and pull unused electric meters that can be stolen or altered. They also can condemn property.

"It is something that we hope will bring pride back to the community," said Bill Langford, a Hillsborough code enforcement supervisor. "Blight brings not only morale issues but also brings in crime."



Although the official kickoff was today, the program got an early start Tuesday when an abandoned apartment building on 136th Avenue was demolished.

Langford said the demolition was part of the operation but had to be done earlier because of the contractor's schedule. At least 10 code enforcement officers will work on the project, Langford said. Other county agencies such as animal services, neighborhood relations and parks, recreation and conservation will participate along with volunteers from the University Area Community

Development Corp.

"We expect enough involvement to make a noticeable difference in the community," Langford said.

The area officers targeted went along East Bearss Avenue from North 22nd Street, south to East Fletcher Avenue and west to North Nebraska Avenue.

