

## SWINE FLU SCARE

### Quarantine hoax causes area-wide stir

By **JASON WITZ STAFF WRITER**

ENGLEWOOD — The house looked like a quarantine zone.

Yellow caution tape stretched across the front yard, cordoning the property from the neighborhood. A barricade blocked the driveway, while biohazard signs warned of a swine flu outbreak. The whole display caused quite a stir among neighbors, who called the health department concerned about the potential outbreak hitting so close to home. But investigators say the whole thing was just a hoax.

The Charlotte County Sheriff's Office responded to the 9000 block of St. Catherine Avenue Saturday afternoon to a report of a suspicious house marked as quarantined. According to authorities, the Department of Health was inundated with questions from residents about whether the swine flu case was legitimate.

Health officials had no such reports. Deputies arrived to find the home covered in yellow tape, along with postings throughout the property cautioning residents to stay back. At first glance, the display looked believable, the deputy on scene reported, although it was obvious the set-up was intended as a joke upon further inspection.

The signs contained political propaganda and personal opinions from the person(s) responsible, making reference to "Mexican travelers not permitted" and President Barack Obama. The homeowners returned to the house Sunday and told authorities they were confident it was a prank, as they played pranks on friends in the past, according to the report. They could not be reached for comment Tuesday.

"There is no crime here," said Sheriff's Office spokesman Bob Carpenter. "It wasn't the best thing to do right now, given the seriousness of the swine flu alert." Swine flu, known officially as flu strain H1N1, has been confirmed in at least 36 states, and one person has died in the United States as a result of the outbreak.

Florida had five confirmed cases and 19 probable cases, as of Tuesday afternoon.

E-mail: [jwitz@sun-herald.com](mailto:jwitz@sun-herald.com)