

Menacing Clowns Now Spooking SC, Puzzling Police

One clown showed up on a roadside in a rain poncho, another waved money at children near woods.

The reported sightings of silent, menacing clowns in northeastern South Carolina may be part of a horror movie publicity stunt or an elaborate hoax, but they are no laughing matter for parents and police.

Over the past two weeks, residents have told authorities they have spotted clowns, or people who looked like clowns, on at least eight occasions.

Investigators have failed to confirm a single sighting and the descriptions have varied in detail. But police are nevertheless urging parents to be cautious.

"I will usually let my son play in our backyard where I can see him from the kitchen, but now I won't let him go outside the house without me," said Jessie Owen, a 29-year-old Greenville mother of two.

"All it would take is one second. One promise of candy and he would be gone," she said.

One theory is that the clowns are connected to the release of the independent horror movie "31," by director Rob Zombie. A preview of the movie, which features a gang of sadistic clowns, screened on Thursday evening at a theater in Greenville, population 61,000.

Greenville Police Chief Ken Miller told reporters that investigators do not know if the sightings had any connection with the movie, whether it was one or more people looking for "kicks" or something more sinister.

Representatives of the movie could not be reached for comment.

One motorist in Greenville called 911 to say he caught a fleeting glimpse of a figure standing by the side of the road wearing a “clown mask” and a clear rain poncho, according to Master Deputy Ryan Flood of the Greenville County Sheriff’s Office. The caller said the clown then disappeared into a woods.

The officer who investigated the alleged sighting was unable to find anything suspicious, Flood said, just as with the previous reports from in and around Greenville.

Two days earlier, a women said she saw a middle-aged man with white facial makeup and flaming red hair standing silently outside a laundromat. Police fielded two reports of clown sightings on Thursday from an apartment complex in town.

Sightings have spread to a neighboring county, where a woman in Spartanburg reported seeing a person dressed as a clown in her backyard on Wednesday night.

Several people reported seeing a man dressed as a clown outside Greenville trying to lure the children into the woods by waving a wad of cash and a green laser light.

“This is something we are taking very seriously, especially because of the allegations of the people dressed at clowns attempting to lure children into the woods,” Flood said.

The restiveness in Greenville was enough for police to warn that South Carolina law prohibits anyone over age 18 from dressing up as a clown. Chief Miller said a city ordinance related to “molesting or disturbing the public” could also lead to prosecution of clowns taken into custody. {eo}

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