



*Office of the United States Attorney
District of Arizona*

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PHOENIX-BASED METHAMPHETAMINE TRAFFICKING CELL LEADERS SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON

PHOENIX - U.S. District Judge Roslyn O. Silver recently sentenced five men to federal prison after they pleaded guilty to various charges arising out of their involvement with a methamphetamine distribution organization operating in the greater Phoenix area. Santiago Humberto Chaidez-Meza, 32, and Maragarito Barraza-Villareal, 31, both of Durango, Mexico, pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute 500 Grams or More of Methamphetamine. On Friday, September 25, 2009, Barraza-Villareal was sentenced to 12 years and seven months in federal prison. Chaidez-Meza was sentenced to 14 years in federal prison on September 8, 2009.

The Drug Enforcement Administration conducted a multi-month investigation of these drug traffickers beginning in early 2008. Through interception of telephone calls, surveillance, and search warrants, agents revealed that Chaidez-Meza and Barraza-Villareal obtained methamphetamine from sources of supply in Mexico, washed and repackaged the methamphetamine at houses in the Phoenix area and used wire transfer services, as well as a courier, to send money back to Mexico.

On June 9, 2008, Barraza-Villareal and Chaidez-Meza arranged to have six pounds of methamphetamine delivered to one of their stash houses in Avondale, Ariz. DEA agents arrested them as they separately left the house. Each possessed a loaded handgun. A search of the Avondale house revealed six more firearms, including three assault rifles, 1,490.8 grams of pure methamphetamine and 399.1 grams of Dimethylsulfone, a cutting agent used to dilute methamphetamine. In another house used by the drug traffickers, agents found \$127,251 in U.S. currency and two firearms.

Three other members of the conspiracy were sentenced earlier this summer. Jesus Rosario Ortiz-Esparza pleaded guilty to Use of a Communication Facility to Facilitate Drug Trafficking and was sentenced to 48 months in prison on July 17, 2009. Manuel de Jesus Leon-Heredia pleaded guilty to Use of a Firearm in Relation to Drug Trafficking and was sentenced on July 14, 2009, to 60 months in prison. Esteban Munoz-Sanchez pleaded guilty to Illegal Reentry After Deportation and Conspiracy to Possess Firearms by a Prohibited Possessor and was sentenced on August 26, 2009, to 37 months in prison. All three are citizens of Mexico.

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Phoenix Strike Force and involved the efforts of the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Criminal Division of the Internal Revenue Service, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Phoenix Police Department. The prosecution was handled by James B. Morse Jr. Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

CASE NUMBER: CR-08-619-PHX-ROS
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