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United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown
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CONTACT: Lauren Horwood
PHONE: (916) 554-2706
lauren.horwood@usdoj.gov

METHAMPHETAMINE MANUFACTURING ORGANIZATION AND ASSOCIATES **CHARGED IN JOINT LOCAL-FEDERAL OPERATION**

Seven Charged, 10 Pounds of Methamphetamine, Large-Scale Laboratory & Guns Seized

FRESNO, Calif. — United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown and Merced County District Attorney Larry D. Morse II, announced that a grand jury sitting in Fresno returned a five-count indictment today charging JOSE GUADALUPE TEJEDA, 30; JESUS GUTIERREZ VIRELAS, 27; JOSE GABRIEL PEREZ CORANEL, 32; JAVIER RODRIGUEZ BALDOVINOS, 45; and JORGE CORNELIO QUIROS, 33, with conspiracy to manufacture, to distribute, and to possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine; as well as various counts of manufacturing, distribution, and possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine, and an asset forfeiture count. The Merced County District Attorney's Office is also prosecuting two associates of the organization in Merced County Superior Court on state narcotics charges stemming from the same investigation. Those defendants are JOSE CHAVEZ HERNANDEZ, 32; and PEDRO MENDEZ VALENCIA, 36.

These cases are the product of an investigation conducted by the Merced-Mariposa High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force (HIDTA), which includes the California State Department of Justice – Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement, Merced County Sheriffs' Department, Mariposa County Sheriff's Department, California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Parole Division, and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Marlon Cobar, who is prosecuting the federal case, court-authorized wiretaps revealed that members of a drug manufacturing organization purchased chemicals and items capable of manufacturing large amounts of methamphetamine and were responsible for the distribution and sales of large quantities of methamphetamine in the Central Valley, the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento, and to Arizona, Oregon and Washington.

On September 18, 2009, the task force executed search warrants at locations in Merced County associated with the organization. In rural Hillmar, officers discovered an operational lab capable of producing up to 24 pounds of methamphetamine at a time. They seized over seven pounds of crystal methamphetamine still in its "drying" stages, as well as two semiautomatic rifles and a shotgun. Officers arrested TEJEDA, VIRELAS, BALDOVINOS, QUIROS, HERNANDEZ, and VALENCIA there. The site required environmental cleanup following the search.

Stated United States Attorney Brown, "The Merced-Mariposa HIDTA is to be commended for its ongoing efforts in battling the resurgence of methamphetamine laboratories in the Central Valley. Not only do these labs produce a poisonous product that destabilizes our communities, but the toxic waste they leave behind endangers public health and causes serious environmental degradation."

The defendants will be arraigned on October 30, 2009 before U.S. Magistrate Judge Dennis L. Beck in Fresno. All defendants, except for CORANEL, remain in custody. Judge Beck issued a no-bail arrest warrant for CORANEL this morning. He is considered a fugitive and his photograph is attached to this release.

If convicted of the charges, the defendants face a mandatory minimum term of ten years in prison and a maximum term of life in prison, along with a maximum fine of \$4 million. The actual sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables and any applicable statutory sentencing factors.

The charges are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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