



Department of Justice

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LEADERS OF MARIJUANA GROW HOUSE NETWORK IN POLK AND HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY SENTENCED

Tampa, Florida - U.S. Attorney A. Brian Albritton announced today that U.S. District Judge Virginia Hernandez Covington has sentenced Juan Carlos Falcon (age 42, of Polk County), Francisco Fernandez (age 45, of Polk County), and Yohan Peraza (age 34, of Polk County) for their roles in a large-scale marijuana grow house network. Falcon and Fernandez were each sentenced to five years in federal prison and ordered then to pay a total of \$41,876 to Lakeland Electric, Peace River Electric Cooperative, and Tampa TECO Electric in restitution for stolen electricity at five marijuana grow houses. Yohan Peraza was sentenced to ten months in federal prison and ordered to pay \$10,700 to Peace River Electric cooperative for stolen electricity at 9225 Cypresswood Drive, Lake Wales, Florida. Peraza's residence, 255 Glenn Ridge Loop, Lakeland, was forfeited to the United States.

Fernandez had pleaded guilty to conspiring to manufacture 100 or more marijuana plants on December 11, 2008. Falcon and Peraza had pleaded guilty on December 23, 2008: Falcon to conspiring to manufacture 100 or more marijuana plants and Peraza to maintaining a place for the purpose of manufacturing marijuana plants.

The Falcon-Fernandez drug trafficking organization operated in Lakeland, Lake Wales, Plant City, and Tampa and included the following grow:

- 8811 Mount Royal Lane, Lakeland, Florida (searched May 15, 2008; seventy-seven marijuana plants seized);
- 9225 Cypresswood Drive, Lake Wales, Florida (searched September 23, 2008; seventy-seven marijuana plants seized);
- 8318 Back Road, Plant City, Florida (searched October 7, 2008; eighty marijuana plants seized); and
- 3925 W. Crawford Street, Tampa, Florida (searched November 4, 2008; found to be a dismantled grow; Falcon, Fernandez, and others harvested approximately seventy marijuana plants from this house on July 29, 2008).

Each grow house was similar in construction. The organization had bypassed local utility meters and stolen electricity to support the grow operations and had converted entire rooms to grow marijuana. For example, carpets were pulled up, holes were cut through floors, ceilings, walls, and doors to accommodate electrical wires, water lines, and ventilation duct work. Closets and bathrooms were used to store lights, ballasts, extra chemical supplies, and fertilizer.

Based upon the number of grow houses identified, law enforcement estimated that the Falcon-Fernandez organization had the potential to generate more than \$5 million annually in illegal proceeds.

Other members of the organization are set for sentencing on March 27, March 31, May 6, and June 26, 2009, for their roles in the conspiracy.

The Drug Enforcement Administration conducted this Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation in close coordination with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office, the Polk County Sheriff's Office, and the Tampa Police Department. Assistant United States Attorney Christopher F. Murray prosecuted the case.

