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# **News Release**

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## **10 defendants connected to the largest indoor marijuana growing operation in state history are sentenced**

Ten individuals connected to what may be the largest indoor marijuana growing operation in Minnesota history were sentenced this week in federal court.

On April 1 in Minneapolis, United States District Court Chief Judge Michael J. Davis sentenced four defendants each on one count of conspiracy to manufacture 1,000 or more marijuana plants. Sentenced were: Tung Nguyen, 34, Bloomington, to 120 months in prison and five years of supervised release; Lai Pham, 37, Shakopee, to 40 months in prison and three years of supervised release; Hung Le, 49, Maplewood, to five years probation; and Thuong Nguyen, 46, Brooklyn Park, to five years probation.

On April 2 Chief Judge Davis sentenced three defendants each on one count of conspiracy to manufacture 1,000 or more marijuana plants. Sentenced were: Tuan Dang, 32, Inver Grove Heights, to 41 months in prison and three years of supervised release; Nam Nguyen, 33, Roseville, to 37 months in prison and three years of supervised release; and Christian Pham, 34, Brooklyn Park, to 37 months in prison and five years of supervised release. Also sentenced was Sonny Pham, 44, Eagan, to 12 months and one day in prison and two years of supervised release on one count of conspiracy to manufacture 100 or more marijuana plants and Thin Duc Do, 31, Bloomington, to five years probation on one count of maintaining a drug involved premises.

Lai Pham was convicted by a jury on Dec. 9, 2008, and the other eight defendants pleaded guilty. All nine were indicted on May 6, 2008.

“The dismantlement of the Nguyen drug trafficking organization by the Drug Enforcement Administration Task Force, the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office, the West Metro Drug Task Force and the West Hennepin Public Safety Department eliminated an \$8 million per year enterprise that negatively impacted the State of Minnesota,” said Dan Moren, Assistant Special Agent in Charge of the DEA’s Minneapolis-St. Paul District Office. “This organization demonstrated its apathy toward the overall well being of the general public by jeopardizing the

safety of our citizens and devaluing over one dozen residences and properties – their profit was a total loss for all Minnesotans.”

“Drug trafficking and indoor marijuana grow operations threaten public safety and damage property values in communities,” said Hennepin County Sheriff Rich Stanek. “The West Metro Drug Task Force initially investigated this drug operation and I commend all of the law enforcement agencies that contributed personnel to working this case. This is an example of diligent and collaborative police work, which is essential in pursuing large-scale, complex investigations.”

Their indictment stated that from August 2007 through April 11, 2008, the nine defendants did unlawfully, knowingly and intentionally conspire with each other and others to manufacture 1,000 or more marijuana plants. During the April 10 arrests, authorities seized more than 5,963 marijuana plants during the execution of 18 federal search warrants in the Twin Cities. Eight grow houses were discovered at two residences in Maplewood and single residences in Brooklyn Park, Burnsville, Coon Rapids, Eagan, Inver Grove Heights and Lakeville.

Previously, in October 2007, law enforcement executed a search warrant at a residence in Brooklyn Park which evidence at trial linked to the conspiracy. As a result, more than 7,000 marijuana plants were seized in connection with this conspiracy.

Evidence presented during the trial showed that each of the residences involved was utilizing a rotating crop schedule in order to have multiple harvests in one year. The jury heard evidence that it cost on average \$25,000 to set up an indoor grow operation. A marijuana grow house which harvests 1,000 plants in a given year could result in more than \$1 million profit.

In a related case, on April 1 Chief Judge Davis sentenced Ryan Thanh Dinh, 37, Burnsville, to 12 months and one day in prison and three years of supervised release on one count of conspiracy. He was indicted on Nov. 14, 2007, and pleaded guilty on May 27, 2008.

According to Dinh’s plea agreement, he admitted that on Oct. 29, 2007, he was transporting approximately 18 ½ pounds of harvested marijuana packaged in half-pound packages and was responsible for the 1,129 live marijuana plants located at the Brooklyn Park residence during the execution of a search warrant. Dinh admitted he knew of the marijuana grow operation and was being compensated for delivering the marijuana.

These cases were the result of an investigation by the DEA, the Hennepin County Sheriff’s Office Narcotics Unit, and the West Hennepin County Drug Task Force, with assistance from both the Northwest and Southwest Hennepin County drug task forces, the Dakota County Drug Task Force, the Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office Narcotics Unit, the Minneapolis Gang Strike Force, the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation Division, the Minnesota National Guard, and the police departments of Burnsville, Bloomington, Brooklyn Park, Coon Rapids, Eagan, Inver Grove Heights, Lakeville, Maplewood and St. Paul. They were prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney LeeAnn K. Bell.