

# NEWS

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United States Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney, District of New Jersey  
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Camden, New Jersey 08101

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***Christopher J. Christie, U.S. Attorney***

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Nov. 19, 2008

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## Jamaican Man Admits to Leading a Bi-Coastal Marijuana Trafficking and Money Laundering Ring

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(More)

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CAMDEN – A Jamaican man pleaded guilty today for his leadership role in a group that ran a bi-coastal marijuana trafficking and money laundering ring that originated in California and expanded in to at least six other states, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Richard Lawson, 42, who resided in San Diego and Tijuana, Mexico, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Joseph E. Irenas to one count of conspiracy to launder the proceeds of drug trafficking. Judge Irenas continued the defendant's detention and scheduled sentencing for Feb. 24.

At his plea hearing, Lawson admitted that beginning in 2004 and continuing until April 2008, he was the leader of a group running a marijuana trafficking and money laundering ring that was responsible for purchasing a total approximately 10,000 pounds of marijuana from Mexican suppliers and then redistributed the marijuana from San Diego, Calif., to at least six other states, including New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Florida, Ohio and Tennessee.

Lawson admitted he established sham or fake corporations to provide a legitimate appearance for the drug trafficking activities and the resulting flow of drug proceeds. Lawson opened bank accounts at Bank of America, and other places, to facilitate the deposit of payments for marijuana sales by those who purchased the drugs from him. Lawson admitted that he instructed the buyers to make deposits in amounts less than \$10,000 to avoid causing the banks to file currency transaction reports. Furthermore, Lawson admitted he instructed the buyers to make multiple cash deposits at different bank branches in amounts less than \$10,000 to avoid the reporting requirement.

Once the money was deposited in the fraudulent accounts, the money was subsequently removed in California through structured cash withdrawals in amounts of less than \$10,000 and driven to Mexico to pay for the marijuana and to hide the proceeds from the government. Lawson admitted that between January 2004 and August 2006, approximately \$1.9 million was deposited into accounts under his control.

A two-year investigation led by the IRS Criminal Investigation Division, Newark Field Office, resulted in the guilty pleas of Lawson and co-defendants, Daniel Adams, Sr., 57, Daniel Adams, II, 25, both of San Diego, and David John, 40, of Swedesboro, N.J. The investigation revealed that Lawson acquired large quantities of marijuana from a Mexican drug cartel operating in Tijuana. Lawson then shipped bulk quantities of marijuana from San Diego to dealers in Camden County, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Memphis, Tallahassee, Louisville and elsewhere.

Lawson, Adams and Adams, II, were arrested by Special Agents with IRS Criminal Investigation and DEA on a 14-count Indictment, which was returned under seal on April 22, 2008, at separate locations on April 22, June 24 and April 29, respectively.

Adams pleaded guilty to a charge of money laundering conspiracy on Aug. 13, 2008, and is awaiting sentencing. Adams, II, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to structure deposits and withdraws on Nov. 5 and is awaiting sentencing.

The charge to which both Lawson and Adams pleaded guilty carries a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$500,000 or twice the any pecuniary gain derived from the offense. The charge to which Adams, II, pleaded guilty carries a statutory maximum penalty of 5 years in prison and a fine of \$500,000 or twice the any pecuniary gain derived from the offense. The charge

John pleaded guilty on Dec. 8, 2006, to an Information charging one count each of conspiracy to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute 100 kilograms or more of marijuana and conspiracy to commit money laundering. John is also awaiting sentencing. The charge drug charge carries a statutory mandatory minimum prison sentence of 5 years and a statutory maximum prison sentence of 40 years, and a fine of up to \$2 million. The money laundering count carries a statutory maximum penalty of 20 years in prison and a fine of \$500,000 or twice the any pecuniary gain derived from the offense.

In determining an actual sentence, Judge Irenas will consult the advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offense, the defendant's criminal history, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents with IRS Criminal Investigation Division, Newark Field Office, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge William P. Offord; the DEA Newark Division, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Gerard P. McAleer; Investigators with the Camden County Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Warren W. Faulk, the IRS-CID's Los Angeles Field Office, under the direction of Acting Special Agent in Charge Catherine Tucker; DEA's Phoenix Division, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Elizabeth W. Kemphall; and DEA's San Diego Division, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Ralph W. Partridge, with the investigation leading to the guilty pleas.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Jason M Richardson of the Criminal Division in Camden.

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Defense Attorneys:

Lawson - Ed Crisonino, Esq. Haddon Township

Adams - Martin Isenberg, Esq. Gibbsboro

Adams, II - Thomas Young, Esq. Assistant Federal Public Defender

John - Michael J. Diamonstein, Esq. Philadelphia