

NEWS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 24, 2008

Continental Airlines Employees Charged with Conspiracy to
Distribute Heroin by Utilizing International Flights

(More)

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NEWARK – Two Continental Airlines employees were charged today in connection with a conspiracy to distribute heroin aboard inbound international flights to Newark Liberty International Airport, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

Jose Moreno, 43, of Kenilworth, and Joseph Muniz, 55, of Perth Amboy, appeared before U.S. Magistrate Judge Patty Shwartz this afternoon on a Criminal Complaint. The men are charged with one count of conspiracy to distribute and to possess with the intent to distribute more than one hundred grams of heroin, an offense which carries a statutory minimum penalty of five years in prison and a statutory maximum penalty of 40 years in prison, in addition to a fine of up to \$2 million. At the initial appearance, bail was set for each defendant at \$250,000, pending disposition of federal charges.

Muniz and Moreno were taken into custody Thursday at the airport, and held in federal custody until their first appearance today, when the criminal Complaint naming them was filed.

According to the Complaint, Moreno worked as a Ramp Side employee of Continental Airlines, and Muniz worked as a Continental Airlines mechanic in its technical operations division. The men are alleged to have worked with one another and with others as part of an international narcotics trafficking organization with illicit ties to El Salvador and Colombia.

The investigation is continuing.

The arrests followed a law enforcement operation involving the use of confidential informants, electronic surveillance and a two-month court-authorized wiretap investigation. The participants in this drug trafficking network used Continental Airlines planes and equipment to import narcotics into the United States for subsequent distribution to purchasers in and around New Jersey.

On at least one occasion, packages containing heroin were hidden in compartments holding life jackets. The investigation revealed that a Continental plane that had left Cali, Colombia and came first into the U.S. via Houston in February had two packages with a total 800 grams of heroin hidden in the life jacket compartments. Agents seized the heroin in late February, and listened to and observed the activities of the defendants as they planned to get into the plane in Newark to find and retrieve the drugs.

Agents on Thursday arrested both men as they sat in a car near an employee bus stop at Terminal C of the airport.

To date, according to law enforcement sources, the street value of the heroin seized in the

investigation is approximately \$500,000.

Christie credited Special Agents of the Department of Homeland Security, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Kyle Hutchins, as well as detectives from the Union Prosecutor's Office, under the direction of Prosecutor Theodore J. Romankow, with the investigation that led to the arrests and the criminal Complaint filed today.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Dennis C. Carletta of the U.S. Attorney's Office Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) unit in Newark.

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Defense Counsel:

David Holman, Esq., of the federal Public Defender's Office, for Moreno
Al Rivas, Esq., for Muniz