



U.S. Department of Justice

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PRESS RELEASE

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DEA “MET” HITS DRUG TRAFFICKERS IN ESPANOLA VALLEY

Agents with the Drug Enforcement Administration’s Mobile Enforcement Team (“MET”), assisted by federal, state and local law enforcement officers, executed a string of arrest warrants yesterday in Espanola, New Mexico and the surrounding area. The warrants were issued in conjunction with federal indictments that were returned on June 8, 2010 and criminal complaints filed in the 1st Judicial District Court of the State of New Mexico. A total of twenty defendants face federal charges in federal indictments. Fifteen were arrested yesterday and are being arraigned in the United States District Court this morning. Another fourteen defendants are being prosecuted by the District Attorney's Office for the 1st Judicial District in State District Court. Many of the thirty-four defendants are charged with trafficking in heroin, a drug that has long plagued the northern New Mexico community of Espanola. Others are charged with trafficking in cocaine, crack-cocaine and methamphetamine.

The DEA’s MET was deployed to the Espanola Valley where it has been conducting undercover operations for the past few months. The MET program is a cooperative program with state and local counterparts that was conceived by the DEA in 1995 in response to the overwhelming problem of drug-related violent crime in towns and cities across the nation. Since the program's inception, more than 475 deployments have been completed nationwide, resulting in more than 19,500 arrests. There have been twelve MET deployments in New Mexico since the inception of the program. The Espanola Valley was selected as a site for a MET deployment due, in part, to the high availability of Mexican black tar heroin which has posed a major problem for local law enforcement authorities. The Espanola Valley consistently is rated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and other statistical reporting agencies as having the highest per capita heroin overdose death rate in the United States.

United States Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales stressed the importance of teamwork by both the investigating agencies and the prosecutors in finding ways to safeguard our communities from the scourge of illegal drugs. Mr. Gonzales stated:

This is an important day in the Espanola Valley. The drug problem and the cycle of violence that always comes with drugs has long overwhelmed northern New Mexico. The situation in the Espanola Valley has, quite simply, become unacceptable. So, yesterday we launched a sweeping crackdown on drug traffickers in that area. Yesterday's action represents law enforcement at its best, with multiple levels of government cooperating to send the message that drug trafficking will not be tolerated in our communities. This operation is only a first step towards bringing about positive changes in the Espanola Valley; the ultimate goal is to reduce the availability of heroin so that people in the Valley will not abuse heroin or become addicted. My Office will remain engaged in the continuing effort to safeguard the Espanola Valley.

District Attorney Angela Rosalina "Spence" Pacheco said:

Heroin has been poisoning some of our communities in northern New Mexico for many years. Through this MET operation, the DEA and the Espanola and Santa Fe Police Departments aggressively pursued those who profit from this devastating drug, and my office is committed to seeing that justice is done in every one of the state cases.

DEA Special Agent in Charge Joseph M. Arabit stated:

The arrests made in Espanola are part of DEA's continuing effort to target illicit drug distribution in northern New Mexico, where heroin and other drug abuse takes a tremendous toll on families and communities as a whole. We will continue to work closely with our federal state and local law enforcement partners in order to enhance the quality of life for the citizens in this region.

The cases arising out of the MET operation in the Espanola Valley were investigated by the DEA in partnership with the Espanola Police Department and the Santa Fe Police Department. The federal cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys John Anderson, Rhonda Backinoff, Norman Cairns, Samuel Hurtado, Stephen Kotz and Lynn Wang. Assistant District Attorneys Shelley Strong is

coordinating the prosecution of the state cases.

An indictment is only an accusation. All criminal defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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