

PRESS RELEASE

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FIRST DEFENDANT SENTENCED IN ST. CROIX TRIBAL DRUG INVESTIGATION

Madison, Wisconsin -- Erik C. Peterson, United States Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin, announced that Joseph Merrill, 28, Siren, Wis., was sentenced on Friday, February 27, in U.S. District Court in Madison to four years in prison without parole. Merrill previously pleaded guilty to distributing approximately 18 grams of crack cocaine with co-defendant Manley Williams.

On September 9, 2006, an undercover agent from the Wisconsin Department of Justice, working with a confidential informant, arranged to purchase crack cocaine from Manley Williams. Joseph Merrill drove Williams to the drug deal, which took place outside Trego, Wis., and the undercover agent purchased 18.5 grams of crack cocaine.

Co-defendant Manley Williams pleaded guilty on February 27, 2009, and will be sentenced on April 24, 2009. He faces a mandatory minimum penalty of five years in prison, and a maximum penalty of 40 years in prison, without parole. Merrill faced the same mandatory minimum penalty, but Chief Judge Barbara B. Crabb granted the

government's motion and sentenced Merrill below the mandatory minimum sentence based on Merrill's early cooperation in this investigation and his willingness to testify at Williams' trial, which led to Williams' guilty plea.

United States Attorney Peterson stated that Merrill's sentencing was the first resulting from a long-term investigation being conducted by the Wisconsin Department of Justice, Division of Criminal Investigation; Federal Bureau of Investigation; St. Croix Tribal Police Department; Rice Lake Police Department; Barron County Sheriff's Department; Burnett County Sheriff's Department; Polk County Sheriff's Department; and Wisconsin State Patrol. Peterson stated that the investigation is continuing and additional indictments and arrests are expected.

Prosecution of the cases is being handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney John W. Vaudreuil.

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