

Department of Justice

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**“Operation Saddle Up” Charges Six Additional Defendants
with Meth Manufacturing Conspiracy in West Central Illinois**

Task Force Investigation has Charged 77 Defendants

Lewistown, Ill. – Six more defendants have been charged with conspiring to manufacture methamphetamine in Fulton county as a result of “Operation Saddle Up,” a cooperative, ongoing investigation targeting illegal drug activity in west central Illinois. To date, this brings the total number to 77 defendants charged as a result of this ongoing cooperative effort.

The charges announced today in Lewistown by federal, state and local law enforcement are the result of investigations by the Fulton County and Mason County Sheriffs’ Offices; the Canton Police Department; Havana Police Department; and Illinois State Police Zone 4 Investigations. The U.S. Marshals Service assisted the investigative agencies in making the arrests yesterday. The cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Tate Chambers in cooperation with the Fulton County and Mason County State’s Attorneys’ Offices.

The indictment, returned last month by a federal grand jury, but sealed pending the defendants’ arrests, charges each of the six defendants with one count of conspiracy to manufacture more than 500 grams of methamphetamine in Fulton county and elsewhere, in Illinois, from late 2010 to the present:

Joseph Allen Phelps, 27, of Ipava, Ill., (in custody in Tazewell County);
Ryan Lynn Mills, 25, of Havana;
Jacob Charles Putman, 23, of Canton;
Brian Lee Fulton, 28, of Lewistown;
Matthew Lee Williamson, 27, of Canton; and,
Mitchell Gideon Williamson, 28, of Canton (in custody in Fulton county.)

If convicted, the statutory penalty for conspiracy to manufacture 500 or more grams of methamphetamine is a mandatory minimum 10 years in prison and up to life; if a defendant has a prior felony drug conviction, the mandatory sentence is 20 years and up to life in prison; with two prior felony drug convictions, the statutory penalty is life in prison.

The defendants arrested yesterday are expected to make their initial court appearances today in federal court in Peoria, Ill., before U.S. Magistrate John A. Gorman.

Members of the public are reminded that an indictment is merely an accusation; the defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

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