

NEWS

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Cocaine Distributor Sentenced to 26 Years in Federal Prison

(More)

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NEWARK – A Tucson, Ariz. cocaine supplier was sentenced to 26 years in federal prison today on a charge of conspiracy to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine, U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

U.S. District William H. Walls also ordered Alex Hetherington, 30, to serve five years of supervised release upon the completion of his prison sentence. At his plea hearing on Jan. 29, 2008, Hetherington admitted that during the month of February 2007, he conspired with others to deliver 212 kilograms of cocaine. The cocaine that was the subject of the case had a purity of 86.7 percent. The wholesale value of the cocaine was estimated at approximately \$4 million.

After his arrest, Hetherington admitted that he was involved in other large drug deliveries of marijuana, cocaine and methamphetamine to New Jersey, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Pennsylvania, Maryland, California and Illinois. Hetherington stated that the illegal drugs he distributed came from Colombia, traveled through Mexico and entered the United States via the U.S./Mexican border, possibly through tunnels. Hetherington admitted overseeing the delivery of the drugs in the United States, using stash houses and numerous other individuals to assist him.

The investigation began when the 212 kilograms of cocaine was seized by the Texas Highway Patrol and Texas Department of Public Safety near Amarillo, Texas, after officers observed the driver of a vehicle containing the cocaine operating the vehicle in an unsafe manner. The narcotics were transported across the country under the supervision of federal and many local law enforcement agencies. A controlled delivery of sham narcotics substituted for the original product was eventually made in Carlsdadt, N.J. Hetherington, who had flown from Arizona to New Jersey to oversee the drugs' final distribution, was arrested after he was caught moving the fake narcotics from one vehicle to another, believing he was picking up the real cocaine for further distribution.

In determining the actual sentence, Judge Walls consulted 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, was not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Christie credited Special Agents of the DEA's Newark Division, under the direction of Gerard P. McAleer, Special Agent in Charge of the Newark Division; Trooper Trevor Dillard, Sgt. Joe Medrano from the Texas Highway Patrol, Sgt William T. Wilson, Jr. from the Texas Department of Public Safety; and numerous local police departments, with the investigation of the case.

The government was represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Sharon Ashe of the Criminal Division in Newark.

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Defense Attorney: Kenneth Kayser, Esq., Livingston, N.J.