

NEWS

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Members of Southern New Jersey Methamphetamine Trafficking Conspiracy Arrested

(More)

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CAMDEN – Members of a drug trafficking conspiracy responsible for the transportation and distribution of bulk quantities of methamphetamine throughout southern New Jersey, along with wholesale and street level drug dealers who the co-conspirators supplied, were arrested over the course of the last eight days on federal and state charges, U.S. Attorney Paul J. Fishman, Camden County Prosecutor Warren W. Faulk and FBI Special Agent in Charge Janice K. Fedarcy announced.

On Dec 3, 2009, federal, state, county and local law enforcement officers from the member agencies of the Philadelphia-Camden HIDTA arrested six individuals on federal criminal Complaints and executed search warrants on properties in Hammonton, Waterford and Winslow. In addition, two other individuals who were already incarcerated on state charges were served with federal charges.

Beginning on Dec. 7 and continuing through the week, authorities arrested an additional 20 individuals on state charges in connection with the distribution of methamphetamine, cocaine and bulk quantities of marijuana. For details on these arrests, please see the news release issued by the Camden County Prosecutor's Office.

The arrests resulted from a 22-month undercover HIDTA investigation into an international drug trafficking organization which was responsible for smuggling methamphetamine and marijuana from Mexico into the U.S.

The Complaints allege that eight federally charged defendants conspired to transport multiple pound shipments of methamphetamine from Ohio to the Hammonton area; distributed the drugs to other area drug dealers; and several of the defendants were involved in the illegal trafficking of assault weapons. Through the investigation, authorities seized approximately 7 pounds of methamphetamine and crystal methamphetamine with a wholesale value of approximately \$245,000, 1.5 kilogram of cocaine, \$18,000 in cash, an AK-47 assault rifle and a fully automatic Yugoslavian M-56 machine gun.

Individually charged in separate Complaints, which were issued under seal on Dec. 2, were Rafael Vasquez, Antonio Leon, Efrain Fregozo-Torres, Juan Santiaguin, Javier Tijerin Gonzalez, Jose Vasquez, Francisco Lopez Silva, and Carmen Lopez Hernandez. Please see the addendum for additional information on the federal defendants, charges and penalties.

Rafael Vasquez, Leon, Fregozo-Torres, Gonzalez and Jose Vasquez were arrested on Dec.3 at various locations throughout southern New Jersey. The five defendants made initial appearances on Dec. 4 before U.S. Magistrate Karen M. Williams, who detained each of the defendants without bail pending trial. Santiaguin was arrested by federal authorities in Columbus, Ohio, on Dec. 3 and will have an initial appearance in federal court upon his return to New Jersey.

Silva and Hernandez, who were arrested on Nov. 6 in Winslow while en route from Ohio to Hammonton, had their initial appearances in federal court on Dec. 9, and both were detained pending trial. At the time of Silva and Hernandez's arrest, law enforcement officers recovered approximately 2 pounds of methamphetamine from a hidden compartment within the vehicle they were driving.

Despite the charges set forth in the complaints, every defendant is presumed innocent, unless and until found guilty beyond a reasonable doubt, following a trial at which the defendant has all of the trial rights guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution and federal law.

In determining an actual sentence, the judge to whom the case is assigned would, upon a conviction, consult 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, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodial terms must serve nearly all that time.

Fishman credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Janice K. Fedarczyk in Philadelphia, and Investigators with the member agencies of the Philadelphia/Camden HIDTA Task Force, under the direction of Camden County Prosecutor Warren W. Faulk, with developing the investigation which resulted in the arrests.

Fishman also thanked for their assistance the police departments of Berlin Township, Berlin Bough, Gloucester Township, Hammonton, Lindenwold, Pine Hill, Salem, Voorhees and Winslow.

The Camden HIDTA task force is comprised of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of New Jersey, the Camden County Prosecutor's Office, FBI, DEA, ATF, ICE, IRS, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Camden Police Department, New Jersey State Police, New Jersey Division of Criminal Justice, Camden County Sheriff's Department, Delaware River Port Authority Police and the U.S. Marshal's Service.

The government is represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Kevin Smith of the Criminal Division in Camden.

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Federal Defendants Arrested and/or Charged

- **Efrain Fregozo-Torres**, 30, a.k.a. “Alverto Murillo,” of Hammonton, charged with conspiracy to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine. Fregozo-Torres allegedly distributed methamphetamine to Santiaguin.
- **Juan Santiaguin**, 29, of Winslow, charged with conspiracy to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine. Santiaguin allegedly distributed methamphetamine to Leon.
- **Antonio Leon**, 35, of Hammonton, charged with conspiracy to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine. Fregozo-Torres allegedly distributed methamphetamine to Rafael Vasquez.
- **Rafael Vasquez**, 37, of Hammonton, charged with conspiracy to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine; engaging in the business of dealing in firearms without a license; and possession of a fully automatic Yugoslvian-made M-56 machine gun. Vasquez allegedly dealt illegally in firearms with Jose Vasquez and Gonzalez and distributed methamphetamine to them.
- **Jose Vasquez**, 49, of Hammonton, charged with conspiracy to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine; engaging in the business of dealing in firearms without a license; and possession of a fully automatic Yugoslvian-made M-56 machine gun. Vasquez allegedly distributed methamphetamine in Atlantic County and illegally dealt in firearms along with Rafael Vasquez and Gonzalez.
- **Javier Tijerin Gonzalez**, 40, of Hammonton, charged with conspiracy to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine; engaging in the business of dealing in firearms without a license; and possession of a fully automatic Yugoslvian-made M-56 machine gun. Gonzalez allegedly distributed methamphetamine in Atlantic County and illegally dealt in firearms along with Rafael Vasquez and Jose Vasquez.
- **Francisco Lopez Silva**, 51, of Columbus, Ohio, charged with conspiracy to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine. Silva allegedly transported methamphetamine from Ohio to New Jersey to distribute to Fregozo-Torres.
- **Carmen Lopez Hernandez**, 31, of Columbus, Ohio, charged with conspiracy to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine. Hernandez allegedly transported methamphetamine from Ohio to New Jersey to distribute to Fregozo-Torres.

For the charge of conspiracy to distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine, the mandatory minimum penalty is 10 years in prison and the maximum statutory penalty is life and a maximum statutory fine of \$4 million.

For the charge of engaging in the business of dealing in firearms without a license, the maximum statutory penalties are 5 years in prison and a maximum statutory fine of \$250,000.

For the charge of possession of a fully automatic Yugoslvian-made M-56 machine gun, the maximum statutory penalties are 10 years in prison and a maximum statutory fine of \$250,000.