



Department of Justice

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Twenty-Two Year Sentence for Drug and Money Laundering Charges

LEXINGTON, Ky. – Marcos Salas Mendoza, 30, was sentenced to 22 years in federal prison for his role in a conspiracy to distribute cocaine, fentanyl, and acetylfentanyl, and to launder drug proceeds.

The investigation into Salas' criminal activities began in 2018 and was jointly conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Lexington Division of Police. As part of the overall scheme to distribute drugs and to launder money, Salas, co-defendant Marcos Gonzalez Garfias, and others routinely smuggled drugs and drug proceeds in the axles of vehicles to avoid detection by law enforcement. Gonzalez Garfias previously pleaded guilty to the same offenses and is scheduled to be sentenced on November 1.

According to court documents, when agents executed a search warrant at Salas's "stash house" in Lexington, they found multiple disassembled axles. The agents found large quantities of controlled substances concealed within those automotive parts and concealed within numerous appliances, such as the dishwasher, microwave oven, stove and refrigerator. Overall, agents located a total of over 3 kilograms of fentanyl nearly 1 kilogram of acetylfentanyl, and nearly 10 kilograms of cocaine from the search of the residence and a storage unit. Agents also located \$134,000 in drug proceeds at the stash house.

A total of approximately \$257,000 in drug proceeds was seized and forfeited as a result of the investigation. Salas admitted in his plea agreement that the drug proceeds were destined for Mexico to members of the larger drug trafficking organization to promote their drug-trafficking activities.

"Fentanyl is potentially lethal at very low levels – a dose as small as 2 milligrams can be deadly. The defendant is responsible for conspiring to distribute nearly 6 pounds of fentanyl and over a pound of acetylfentanyl- enough to kill well over one million people," said United States Attorney Robert M. Duncan Jr. "I commend the cooperative efforts of the Lexington Police Department and DEA in this investigation. Removing these large quantities of deadly drugs from the community undoubtedly saved lives. The lengthy sentence imposed by the Court reflects the dangerousness of the defendant's conduct and should serve as a warning to others involved in similar drug trafficking activities."

Robert M. Duncan Jr., United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky; Daniel Dodds, Acting Special Agent in Charge, DEA Louisville and Lawrence Weathers, Chief of Police, Lexington Division of Police, jointly announced the indictment. Assistant United States Attorney Todd Bradbury prosecuted the case on behalf of the United States.

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