



# Department of Justice

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Eastern District of Kentucky

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## **South Carolina Man Sentenced to 240 Months for Armed Methamphetamine Trafficking**

**LONDON, Ky.** - A Blacksburg, South Carolina man, Joe Barlow Owens, 44, was sentenced to 240 months in federal prison on Wednesday, before U.S. District Judge Claria Horn Boom, for possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine and possession of a firearm in furtherance of drug trafficking.

In his prior guilty plea, Owens admitted that he committed both offenses on February 25, 2019, in Knox County. According to his guilty plea agreement, law enforcement officials searched his vehicle and found over 700 grams of methamphetamine, cash, and a loaded firearm, which Owens admitted was to protect his drugs and drug proceeds. Owens also admitted that he knew he had a prior felony conviction, for possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine.

Owens pleaded guilty in March 2020.

Under federal law, Owens must serve 85 percent of his prison sentence. Upon his release, he will be under the supervision of the U.S. Probation Office for 10 years.

Robert M. Duncan, Jr., United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky; Jeffrey Todd Scott, Special Agent in Charge, DEA, Louisville Field Division; and Sheriff Mike Smith, Knox County Sheriff's Department, jointly made the announcement.

The investigation was directed by DEA and the Knox County Sheriff's Department. The United States was represented by Assistant U.S. Attorney Andrew Trimble.

This case was prosecuted as part of the Department of Justice's "[Project Safe Neighborhoods](#)" Program (PSN), which is a nationwide, crime reduction strategy aimed at decreasing violent crime in communities. It involves a comprehensive approach to public safety — one that includes investigating and prosecuting crimes, along with prevention and reentry efforts. In the Eastern District of Kentucky, U.S. Attorney Duncan coordinates PSN efforts in cooperation with various federal, state, and local law enforcement officials.

This case is also part of Project Guardian, the Department of Justice's signature initiative

to reduce gun violence and enforce federal firearms laws. Initiated by the Attorney General in the fall of 2019, Project Guardian draws upon the Department's past successful programs to reduce gun violence; enhances coordination of federal, state, local, and tribal authorities in investigating and prosecuting gun crimes; improves information-sharing by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives when a prohibited individual attempts to purchase a firearm and is denied by the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), to include taking appropriate actions when a prospective purchaser is denied by the NICS for mental health reasons; and ensures that federal resources are directed at the criminals posing the greatest threat to our communities. Click [here](#) for more information about Project Guardian.

The year 2020 marks the 150th anniversary of the Department of Justice. Learn more about the history of our agency at [www.Justice.gov/Celebrating150Years](http://www.Justice.gov/Celebrating150Years).

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