

For Immediate Release
July 1, 2011

**FIVE RESIDENTS OF VALENCIA AND SOCORRO COUNTIES ARRESTED
ON FEDERAL METHAMPHETAMINE TRAFFICKING CHARGES**

ALBUQUERQUE – United States Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales announced that, on June 30, 2011, five defendants who reside in Valencia and Socorro Counties were arrested on federal methamphetamine trafficking charges. The defendants, who are charged in criminal complaints, were arrested following a 16-month investigation led by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the Los Lunas Police Department (LLPD). The investigation, which was code-named “Vanilla Sky,” was pursued under the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) program, a nationwide initiative that combines the resources and unique expertise of federal agencies, along with their local counterparts, in a coordinated attack against major drug trafficking and money laundering organizations.

According to court filings, the defendants arrested on June 30, 2011 were part of a large scale methamphetamine trafficking organization that operated in Valencia County, and allegedly was led by **Arturo Acosta-Astorga**, 52, and **Ovidio Estrada**, 37, both residents of Los Lunas, New Mexico. Members of the organization included **Carmen Diaz**, 41, and **Donnie Hobbs**, 31, of Veguita, New Mexico, and **Sylvia Sisneros**, 50, of Socorro, New Mexico. These five defendants are charged with conspiracy to distribute more than 50 grams of methamphetamine. If convicted, each faces a maximum penalty of imprisonment for not less than ten years nor more than life and a \$10,000,000 fine. Estrada, Diaz and Hobbs were arrested yesterday, and made their initial appearances in federal court this morning. The three are detained pending detention hearings, which are scheduled for July 5, 2011. Acosta-Astorga and Sisneros have yet to be apprehended, and are considered fugitives.

According to the criminal complaint charging the aforementioned defendants, between March 2010 and May 2011, Acosta-Astorga, Estrada, Diaz and Hobbs conspired to sell ounce quantities of methamphetamine to undercover DEA agents on at least ten separate occasions. Diaz allegedly negotiated the methamphetamine transactions, and she and/or Hobbs allegedly delivered the methamphetamine to undercover DEA agents. Acosta-Astorga and Estrada allegedly were the sources of supply for the methamphetamine sold to the undercover DEA agents. The defendants allegedly sold more than a pound of methamphetamine to the undercover DEA agents during the 14-month period covered by the complaint.

The criminal complaint also alleges that **Lonnie Dean**, 46, of Belen, New Mexico, was a member of the conspiracy. Court records reflect that Dean was arrested in Belen on May 26, 2011, after causing the death of an innocent motorist when he sought to evade investigators who were conducting surveillance of a methamphetamine sale. On June 30, 2011, Dean was arraigned in federal court on an indictment charging him with possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute and assaulting, resisting, or impeding a federal officer. Dean faces a maximum penalty of twenty years' imprisonment and a \$1,000,000 fine if convicted of the narcotics charge in the indictment, and up to twenty years' imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine if convicted of the assault charge. Dean entered a not guilty plea to the indictment, and remains detained pending trial.

Another defendant, **Thanh Huynh**, 45, of Los Lunas, New Mexico, was charged in a separate complaint with using a telephone to facilitate a drug trafficking offense. If convicted, Huynh faces a maximum penalty of four years' imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine. Huynh also was arrested yesterday and made his initial appearance in federal court this morning. Huynh is detained pending a detention hearing scheduled for July 5, 2011.

During the course of yesterday's enforcement operation, agents arrested **Jesus Rivas-Cortes**, 28, of Zacatecas, Mexico, after he allegedly supplied Diaz and Hobbs with approximately 262 gross grams of methamphetamine that they intended to sell to an undercover DEA. The criminal complaint charging Rivas-Cortes alleges that, when Rivas-Cortes was arrested, he allegedly was in possession of approximately 148 gross grams of methamphetamine in addition to the 262 gross grams that he provided to Diaz and Hobbs. If convicted, Rivas-Cortes faces a maximum penalty of imprisonment for not less than ten years nor more than life and a \$10,000,000 fine.

United States Attorney Gonzales said, "Yesterday's arrests represent the law enforcement community's latest collaborative efforts to keep illegal drugs out of our neighborhoods and schools. These arrests also strongly illustrate that no community in New Mexico is immune to scourge of drug trafficking and abuse. I will continue to work with my law enforcement partners to make our communities safer places to live and raise families by targeting drug traffickers throughout New Mexico."

"Through our partnership with state and local law enforcement, we are making progress in our efforts to prevent the spread of methamphetamine abuse and trafficking in our communities. This investigation, and the resulting complaints and arrests, are a compelling example of our joint success," said Joseph M. Arabit, Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration-El Paso Division.

Chief Roy E. Melnick, Los Lunas Police Department stated, "Combating illegal drug use and sales is a top priority for the Los Lunas Police Department and for our community. The illegal use and sale of drugs is directly related to property crimes, violent crimes and domestic violence in our area. Several months ago, the Los Lunas Police Department formed a drug task

force, the Valencia County Regional Drug Task Force, with other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies in the area to reduce the illegal use/sale of drugs and to reduce crime overall. Our partnership with these law enforcement agencies and especially with the Drug Enforcement Administration grows stronger every day with the pooling our resources and is beginning to make an impact on the availability of drugs in our area. Yesterday's joint operations and arrests are a good reflection of the on-going investigations we have been conducting. These investigations consume an enormous amount of time and effort to undertake and I greatly appreciate all of our law enforcement partners contribution's in this worthy undertaking."

These cases were investigated primarily by the DEA and LLPD, with assistance from the New Mexico State Police, the Albuquerque Police Department, the U.S. Border Patrol, the New Mexico Motor Transportation Police Division of the New Mexico Department of Public Safety, the Socorro Police Department, the Valencia County Sheriff's Office and Bosque Farms Police Department, and are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Nicholas J. Ganjei.

Charges in complaints and indictments are only accusations. All criminal defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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