



U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Forty-Seven Defendants Charged in HSI-led Drug Trafficking Investigation Linked to Sinaloa Cartel

Release Date: June 5, 2024

More than 400 federal, state and local law enforcement agencies partnered in Imperial Valley takedown

EL CENTRO – Fourteen indictments were unsealed in federal court today charging 47 alleged members of an Imperial Valley-based, Sinaloa Cartel-linked fentanyl- and-methamphetamine distribution network with drug trafficking, firearms and money laundering offenses.

Media B-Roll

Homeland Security Investigations
Enforcement Action

Calexico, California

June 5, 2024
TRT 2:03

In a coordinated takedown this morning, more than 400 federal, state, and local law enforcement officials arrested 36 defendants and executed 25 search warrants in Imperial County, San Diego, Fresno, Los Angeles, Phoenix and Salem, Oregon. As of this afternoon, the search continues for 11 fugitives.

“The Department of Homeland Security and our federal, state and local partners are unrelenting in our work to keep deadly fentanyl off our streets and bring those who traffic in it to justice,” said Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro N. Mayorkas. “The indictments unsealed today are the direct result of our multipronged and coordinated law enforcement approach— one that utilizes all of our government’s resources and capabilities. Together, we are preventing fentanyl and other deadly drugs from being produced, distributed, or consumed, and saving countless lives.”

“Today’s coordinated operation, involving, over 400 federal, state, and local law enforcement officials, marks a decisive blow against an Imperial Valley-based, Sinaloa Cartel-linked distribution network and significantly disrupts the flow of dangerous drugs into our communities,” said Katrina W. Berger, Executive Associate Director for Homeland Security Investigations, San Diego. “This operation is a testament to the power of law enforcement collaboration and our unwavering commitment to bringing these criminals to justice.”

Including seizures today and throughout the long-term investigation, authorities have confiscated more than four kilograms of fentanyl, which amounts to about two million potentially fatal doses; more than 324 kilograms (over 714 pounds) of methamphetamine; significant quantities of cocaine and heroin; and 52 firearms, including handguns and rifles.

The investigation also resulted in the arrest of Alexander Grindley for alleged methamphetamine trafficking while employed as a U.S. Border Patrol agent, and multiple spin-off investigations in this district and others.

Crimes charged in the indictments include drug trafficking, money laundering and gun-related offenses. Court documents indicated the defendants were operating throughout the Imperial Valley—in Brawley, El Centro, Westmoreland, Imperial, Calexico, Niland, Holtville, Calipatria—and in Mexicali, Mexico.

“With this takedown, the Justice Department has dealt yet another blow to the Sinaloa Cartel and its associates,” said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. “I am grateful to the more than 400 law enforcement officers whose work in this operation resulted in dozens of arrests, charges against 47 defendants, and the seizure of firearms, meth, cocaine, heroin, and two million potentially lethal doses of fentanyl. We will continue to be relentless in our fight to protect American communities from the cartels.”

“This investigation tore apart a drug trafficking network responsible for supplying dealers in communities across the region,” said U.S. Attorney Tara McGrath. “But there is still much work to be done. If you’re a parent, and today’s price of fentanyl terrifies you, talk to your kids about the dangers of drug use. If you’re an addict, and your dealer was arrested today, seek treatment. And if you’re a dealer but your supplier was arrested today, look out – we are coming for you next.”

“Today, the El Centro Border Patrol Sector teamed with allied law enforcement agencies to support both Homeland Security Investigations and the United States Attorney’s Office of San Diego in this operation,” said El Centro Sector Chief Gregory Bovino. “Our successful collaboration should be a reminder to criminal organizations in the Imperial Valley and elsewhere that justice will be served.”

“This operation shows what can be accomplished when there is collaboration between federal and local law enforcement agencies,” said Imperial County District Attorney George Marquez. “The Imperial County District Attorney’s office will continue to work together with our partners to bring to justice those that harm or are a danger to our community.”

According to the indictments and search warrants, the defendants belonged to various trafficking organizations that were part of an extensive network supplying all of Imperial County and beyond with dangerous drugs.

According to court records, on June 30, 2021, agents seized two pounds of methamphetamine and a cache of ghost guns and ammunition, including: 15 lower receivers, three upper receivers, multiple barrels and stocks, 18 magazines, 40 Luger 9mm rounds and approximately 400 rounds of .223 Red Army ammunition, which are made in Russia. None of the firearms or firearm parts had any identifying serial numbers or markings. They were all ghost guns. Wiretap intercepts showed that defendant Cory Gershen supplied other members of the organization with ghost guns in exchange for methamphetamine. The investigation also revealed the assault rifles (depicted below) were destined for the organization’s source of supply in Mexico.



Multiple AR-style firearms, parts, pistols, magazines, unfinished firearm parts used to create ghost guns, and a cache of Russian made ammunition.

On June 30, 2021, agents seized additional ghost guns, ammunition and methamphetamine from another member of the same drug trafficking organization. Specifically, agents seized two AR-style ghost guns and a Colt .380 semiautomatic handgun and additional Russian rifle ammunition from defendant Guadalupe Molina-Flores, one of the alleged members of the trafficking organization. According to a search warrant, after seizing the firearms, agents searched Molina-Flores' residence and found 309.4 grams (0.68 pounds) of methamphetamine.



Two more AR-style rifles, a pistol, magazines, and Russian made ammunition. Notably, these were exchanged for drugs.

Fentanyl continues to be a prolific killer. Imperial County experienced 24 opioid-related overdose deaths in 2022, the most recent full year of data available from the California Department of Public Health. The annual mortality rate for 2022 was 13.57 deaths per 100,000 residents—an increase of 41 percent over 2021.

The investigation revealed that the price per fentanyl pill has plummeted. For example, in June 2021, targets of the investigation were obtaining fentanyl pills in Imperial Valley at approximately \$1.65 to \$1.75 per pill. By December 2021, the prices being discussed had dropped to approximately \$1.25 per pill. By May 2024, the same pills were being sold at only 45 cents per pill—less than one-third of the price three years earlier. The precipitous drop in price reflects the increased supply and availability of fentanyl being smuggled into the United States and the close ties between targets of this investigation and their Sinaloa Cartel supplier of fentanyl pills.

This prosecution is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) investigation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level drug traffickers, money launderers, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations that threaten the United States by using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach that leverages the strengths of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies against criminal networks.

Any person with additional information related to this or other criminal activity can contact the HSI tip line at [877-4-HSI-TIP \(tel:1-877-447-4847\)](tel:877-4-HSI-TIP). Callers may remain anonymous.

An indictment, complaint or information in a search warrant is not evidence of guilt. The defendants are presumed innocent and entitled to a fair trial at which the government has the burden of proving guilt beyond a reasonable doubt.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0455-CAB

Name	Age	Location
Maria Isabel Ferrat	34	Brawley, CA

Summary of Charges

- Possession with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1))

Maximum Penalties

- Twenty years in prison and a \$1 million fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0456-CAB

Name	Age	Location
*Guadalupe Molina-Flores, AKA “Lupe”	43	Westmoreland, CA
Stephanie Joann Hernandez, AKA “JoJo”	42	El Centro, CA
*Emmanuel Becerra, AKA “E-Man”	36	Westmorland, CA
Jeremy Clayton Harris, Sr.	44	El Centro, CA
Jack Daniel Myers	41	Westmorland, CA
Cory Gershen	36	Jacumba, CA

Summary of Charges

- Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine, Fentanyl and Heroin (21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 846)
- Possession with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1))
- Felon in Possession of Ammunition (18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1))
- Using, Carrying or Possession of Firearm in Commission of a Drug Trafficking Crime (18 U.S.C. 924(c)(1)(A)(i))

Maximum Penalties

- For conspiracy charge and possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine charges: Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.
- For felon in possession of ammunition charge: Ten years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.
- For using, carrying or possession of firearm in commission of a drug trafficking crime: Five years in prison mandatory consecutive to the related drug trafficking offense and \$250,000 fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0504-CAB

Name	Age	Location
Eduardo Mendoza, AKA “Casper”	31	Niland, CA
Francisco Javier Mendoza, AKA “Pancho”	33	Niland, CA
Carlos Cezar Mendoza	36	Yuma, AZ
Christopher John Coffman	59	Brawley, CA
Daniel Estevan Mendoza	30	Brawley, CA
Tyran Malik Sullivan	40	Brawley, CA
Katelyn Singh	32	Holtville, CA
Cynthia Diaz	35	Imperial, CA
Robert Leroy Humble	49	Brawley, CA
Terry Kyle Christiansen	52	Imperial, CA
Melvin Betha	25	Niland, CA
*Dylan Gutierrez	24	Calexico, CA

Summary of Charges

- Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine and Fentanyl (21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 846)

Maximum Penalties

- Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0849-CAB

Name	Age	Location
*Maricela Selk	47	Brawley, CA

Summary of Charges

- Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 846)

Maximum Penalties

- Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0854-CAB

Name	Age	Location
Christopher Landon Bustin	40	Chula Vista, CA

Summary of Charges

- Possession with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 846)
- Felon in Possession of Firearm and Ammunition (18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1))

Maximum Penalties

- For possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine charges: Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.
- For felon in possession charge: Ten years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0855-CAB

Name	Age	Location
Ernie David Davila	43	Holtville, CA

Summary of Charges

- Possession with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1))

Maximum Penalties

- Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0856-CAB

Name	Age	Location
*Karla Franco	42	Los Angeles, CA
Frederick Joseph McKenna, AKA “Downer”	32	Pico Rivera, CA
Gabino Mora	31	Pico Rivera, CA

Summary of Charges

- Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 846)
- Possession with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1))

Maximum Penalties

- Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0857-CAB

Name	Age	Location
Alexander Bennet Grindley	53	Brawley, CA

Summary of Charges

- Possession with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1))

Maximum Penalties

- Twenty years in prison and a \$1 million fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0857-CAB

Name	Age	Location
Robert Thomas Isaac, AKA “RT”	48	Brawley, CA

Summary of Charges

- Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine, Heroin and Fentanyl (21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 846)

Maximum Penalties

- Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0909-TWR

Name	Age	Location
*Bryan Ayala Alvarez, AKA “Pingo”	41	Brawley, CA

Summary of Charges

- Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 846)
- Possession with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1))

Maximum Penalties

- Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0910-CAB

Name	Age	Location
*Alfred Aldapa Juarez, Jr.	32	Brawley, CA

Summary of Charges

- Possession with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1))

Maximum Penalties

- Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr0911-CAB

Name	Age	Location
*Pedro Alberto Rioseco, AKA “Pete”	42	Calexico, CA
Jesus Antonio Escoto-Troncozo, AKA “Chocho”	45	El Centro, CA

Summary of Charges

- Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 846)
- Possession with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1))
- Felon in Possession of Firearm and Ammunition (18 U.S.C. § 922(g)(1))
- Using, Carrying or Possession of Firearm in Commission of a Drug Trafficking Crime (18 U.S.C. 924(c)(1)(A)(i))

Maximum Penalties

- For conspiracy charge and possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine charges: Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.
- For felon in possession of ammunition charge: Ten years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.
- For using, carrying or possession of firearm in commission of a drug trafficking crime: Five years in prison mandatory consecutive to the related drug trafficking offense and \$250,000 fine.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr00093-RSH

Name	Age	Location
Sergio Reyes-Green	32	Brawley, CA
James Wade Hanks	53	Brawley, CA
Jesus Fernando Romero, AKA “Chuy”	28	(In Custody)
Yomayra Patricia Penuelas	37	El Cajon, CA

Summary of Charges

- Conspiracy to Import Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. §§ 952, 960, 963)
- Importation of Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. §§ 952, 960)
- Aiding and Abetting (18 U.S.C. § 2)
- Conspiracy to Launder Money (21 U.S.C. § 1956(h), 1956(a)(2)(A) and (a)(2)(B))

Maximum Penalties

- For methamphetamine charges: Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.
- For the money laundering charges: Twenty years in prison and a fine of \$500,000 or twice the amount of criminal derived property, whichever is greater.

Defendant – Case Number 24cr00094-RSH

Name	Age	Location
Mario Alberto Urena, AKA “Vaca”	34	Brawley, CA
Pablo Enrique Trejo, AKA “Bolas”	45	Calexico, CA
*Carlos Felipe Ruedas-Celaya	45	
Estevan Ramirez Gonzalez	26	Phoenix, AZ
*Francisco Javier Ramirez-Garcia, AKA “Pitufo”	56	Calexico, CA
*Javier Jacquez	48	Calexico, CA
Araceli Rangel-Torres	28	Mexicali, Mexico
Miguel Angel Flores	31	Fresno, CA
Carlos Valencia Mendoza	29	Mexicali, Mexico

Summary of Charges

- Conspiracy to Distribute Fentanyl (21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 846)
- Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 846)
- Conspiracy to Possess with Intent to Distribute Methamphetamine (21 U.S.C. §§ 841, 846)
- Possession with Intent to Distribute Controlled Substances (21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1))
- Aiding and Abetting (18 U.S.C. § 2)
- Conspiracy to Launder Money (21 U.S.C. § 1956(h), 1956(a)(2)(A) and (a)(2)(B))

Maximum Penalties

- For conspiracy charges: Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.
- For the possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine charges (except Count 3): Life in prison with a mandatory minimum of 10 years and a \$10 million fine.
- For the possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine charge in Count 3: Forty years in prison with a mandatory minimum of five years and a \$5 million fine.
- For the money laundering charges: Twenty years in prison and a fine of \$500,000 or twice the amount of criminal derived property, whichever is greater.

An asterisk (*) denotes a fugitive.

Law Enforcement Partnerships

HSI would like to thank our federal, state and local law enforcement partners that supported this investigation.

- Drug Enforcement Administration
- Department of Justice, Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces
- Department of Justice Office of Enforcement Operations
- United States Border Patrol
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection - Office of Field Operations
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection - Air and Marine Operations
- ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations
- Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco Firearms and Explosives
- United States Postal Inspection Service
- DHS Office of Inspector General
- California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation
- California Highway Patrol
- Brawley Police Department
- El Centro Police Department
- Calexico Police Department
- Imperial County Sheriff's Office
- Imperial County District Attorney's Office
- Imperial County Probation Department
- Imperial Police Department
- Westmorland Police Department
- Calipatria Police Department
- Imperial Valley - Law Enforcement Coordination Center
- Imperial County Child Protective Service
- San Diego County Sheriff's Office
- United States Marshals Service

About HSI

HSI is the principal investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, responsible for investigating transnational crime and threats, specifically those criminal organizations that exploit the global infrastructure through which international trade, travel and

finance move. HSI's workforce consists of over 10,000 employees, assigned to 235 offices within the United States, and 93 overseas locations in 56 countries. HSI's international presence represents the Department of Homeland Security's largest investigative law enforcement presence abroad and one of the largest international footprints in U.S. law enforcement.

Last Updated: 06/06/2024