

U.S. Department of Justice

*United States Attorney
Western District of Washington*

700 Stewart Street, Suite 5220
Seattle, Washington 98101-1271

Tel: (206) 553-7970
Fax: (206) 553-0882

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MEXICAN NATIONAL CONVICTED AS LEADER OF LARGE SKAGIT COUNTY DRUG RING

Conviction Follows Year-long Undercover Investigation of Large Poly-drug Ring

ROBERTO MENDEZ-SANCHEZ, 32, of Mount Vernon, Washington, was convicted by a jury late yesterday following a week-long trial on multiple counts of drug trafficking. The conviction is the culmination of a year-long investigation of a drug dealing network in Skagit County, Washington. The organization, based in Sinaloa, Mexico, was transporting drugs to the northwest, and sending cash back to Mexico. MENDEZ-SANCHEZ and his co-conspirators distributed cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin. Because of a prior drug trafficking conviction, MENDEZ-SANCHEZ faces a mandatory minimum 20 years in prison when sentenced by U.S. District Judge Marsha J. Pechman on May 2, 2008.

In all some 40 people were indicted in connection with this investigation. Thirty-three have pleaded guilty. Twenty-two have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from six months to ten years. Seven remain fugitives. One defendant was arrested just last week. MENDEZ-SANCHEZ was convicted of seven criminal charges: Conspiracy to Distribute Cocaine, Conspiracy to Distribute Heroin, Conspiracy to Distribute Methamphetamine, Distribution of Cocaine, Possession of Cocaine with Intent to Distribute, Distribution of Methamphetamine, and Possession of Methamphetamine with Intent to Distribute.

On November 16, 2006, a federal grand jury returned charges following a year-long investigation by DEA and Skagit County Interlocal Drug Enforcement Unit (SCIDEU). On December 1, 2006, agents and officers arrested MENDEZ-SANCHEZ and 25 other defendants. Some of the defendants sold heroin to undercover agents on multiple occasions. Members of the drug organization sold guns as well as drugs to undercover officers. Other defendants transported money from Skagit County that was destined for Mexico. This group used sophisticated hidden compartments in vehicles to transport drugs and money. Using court authorized wire-taps, investigators monitored the ring's activities for approximately four months.

Over the course of the investigation law enforcement made undercover purchases totaling ten pounds of methamphetamine, five pounds of heroin, and five pounds of cocaine. In addition, agents seized more than \$100,000 from the organization.

This was an Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation, providing supplemental federal funding to the federal and state agencies involved. The case was investigated by the DEA, Bureau of Alcohol, Firearms, Tobacco & Explosives (ATF), Skagit County Interlocal Drug Enforcement Unit (SCIDEU), the Washington State Patrol (WSP), U.S.

Customs and Border Protection (CBP), U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Northwest Regional Drug Task Force (NWRDTF), the Skagit County Sheriff's Department, the Burlington Police Department and the Mount Vernon Police Department. The Anacortes Police Department, Snohomish Regional Drug Task Force, and the Marysville Police Department SWAT unit assisted with the law enforcement activities at the time of the arrests on December 1, 2006.

The case was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Doug Whalley, Matthew Diggs, and John J. Lulejian. Mr. Lulejian is now with the U.S. Attorney's Office in the Central District of California.

For additional information please contact Emily Langlie, Public Affairs Officer for the United States Attorney's Office, at (206) 553-4110.