



NEWS RELEASE

Santa Ana Gang Task Force

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Operation 'Smokin' Aces' Targets Mexican Mafia Operations in Orange County

Federal and State Grand Juries Indict 129 Defendants who Allegedly Assisted the Prison Gang or Were Involved in the Business of Numerous O.C. Street Gangs

SANTA ANA, California – Hundreds of law enforcement officials this morning fanned out across Southern California to conclude Operation “Smokin’ Aces,” an investigation conducted by the Santa Ana Gang Task Force that targeted the Orange County wing of the Mexican Mafia, which allegedly exercises control over Latino street gangs and is a powerful force in the local jail system.

A total of 129 defendants have been named in indictments issued by county and federal grand juries. Each of the defendants is linked to an Orange County street gang that claims allegiance to the Mexican Mafia, which is also called the Eme. Some of the federal defendants also are associates of the prison gang who allegedly worked directly with one of the two Mexican Mafia members who oversee the Orange County wing of the criminal enterprise.

During the course of the investigation, task force members made undercover purchases of 67 weapons (38 handguns and 29 rifles). They also seized 22 pounds of methamphetamine, 1.5 pounds of heroin and three pounds of cocaine.

Over the past three months, a federal grand jury in Orange County has returned 26 indictments that charge a total of 86 defendants. The indictments allege a wide range of criminal conduct, including murder and assault, extortion and “tax” collection, and the street-level distribution of narcotics.

As part of Smokin’ Aces, the Orange County District Attorney has also obtained indictments that charge a total of 43 defendants.

At the center of Smokin’ Aces is a federal racketeering indictment that focuses on the operations of the Mexican Mafia in Orange County, a criminal organization that for

many years has been headed by Peter Ojeda, who allegedly ordered murders and assaults on behalf of the Mexican Mafia. (Ojeda is not formally charged in the indictment unsealed today, but he is currently pending trial in another racketeering case that was filed in 2011 in relation to Operation “Black Flag.”)

The racketeering indictment alleges a conspiracy to violate RICO, the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act. The RICO indictment unsealed today charges 26 defendants associated with the Orange County branch of the Mexican Mafia, including those who implemented orders given by Eme leaders, gang members who collected and delivered “tax payments,” and women associated with the organization who serve the “crucial” function of moving messages from incarcerated Mexican Mafia operatives to their minions on the streets.

The Mexican Mafia is a powerful and violent prison gang that controls drug distribution and other illegal activities within the California penal system and on the streets of Southern California by organizing Latino street gang members for the purpose of establishing a larger network for the Mexican Mafia’s illegal activities. If a street gang does not comply with the demands of the Mexican Mafia, the prison gang will order the assault or murder the offending gang’s members, whether they are in custody or on the streets.

The majority of the federal indictments target gang members who allegedly trafficked in significant quantities of narcotics and firearms. Two of the indictments outline large drug trafficking conspiracies, one of which focuses on the Santa Ana-based Delhi gang. The gang members and their associates were paying “taxes” or “rent” to the Mexican Mafia, and this revenue stream fortified the control the Mexican Mafia has over members of gangs, whether they are on the street or in custody.

The first large drug distribution indictment charges 15 people and outlines the activities of an organization allegedly run by George “Monk” Martinez and John Terrones, who are alleged leaders of the Santa Ana-based Delhi gang and who are also named in the RICO indictment. The narcotics indictment alleges a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine and heroin.

The second narcotics trafficking indictment charges a dozen individuals with participating in a methamphetamine distribution organization headed by Mario Franco, a member of a Santa Ana-based gang who also is named in the RICO indictment.

Operation Smoking Aces is the latest action by the Santa Ana Gang Task Force to target the Mexican Mafia and its control over Latino street gangs in Orange County. In July 2011, authorities announced Operation “Black Flag,” which led to charges against 99 defendants, including Peter Ojeda (see:

<http://www.fbi.gov/losangeles/press-releases/2011/ninety-nine-members-and-associates-of-mexican-mafia-affiliated-gangs-charged-in-operation-black-flag>).

Smokin’ Aces was an investigation conducted by the Santa Ana Gang Task Force, which is comprised of agents and officers with the Federal Bureau of

Investigation; the Santa Ana Police Department; the Orange County Sheriff's Department; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms and Explosives; and the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation – Special Service Unit. Special Agents with IRS – Criminal Investigation also participated in Operation Smoking Aces.

Multiple agencies assisted during today's operation, including personnel with the United States Marshals Service; the Anaheim Police Department; the Newport Beach Police Department; the Fountain Valley Police Department; the Huntington Beach Police Department; the Brea Police Department; the Irvine Police Department; the Buena Park Police Department; and the Garden Grove Police Department.
