



Press Release

For Immediate Release

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OPERATION H.I.T.S. NETS 125 INDIVIDUALS IN MULTI-STATE GUNS AND DRUGS INVESTIGATION

CAPE GIRARDEAU, Mo. – More than 150 law enforcement officers this morning fanned out across southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas to arrest over 80 individuals. Approximately 120 individuals are named in both federal and state court documents that allege a host of violations including firearms and narcotics trafficking and violent crimes.

This morning's massive operation stems from a two year investigation, dubbed H.I.T.S. (High Intensity Trafficking Suppression), initiated in response to firearms violence and the trafficking of firearms and narcotics in southeast Missouri and northeast Arkansas. Numerous law enforcement agencies joined the investigation to achieve the overall goal of making their communities safer. The investigation resulted in over 240 undercover operations and numerous other law enforcement actions.

As a result of this multi-jurisdictional effort, a total of 108 firearms, more than 3 pounds of methamphetamine, more than 3 pounds of crack cocaine/cocaine, more than 26 pounds of marijuana and numerous ecstasy and other narcotic pills were purchased or seized. Of the defendants being sought in today's operation, 14 were previously in custody. Those not arrested today are now considered fugitives. Further, 29 defendants were previously charged and arrested during the two year investigation.

Of the 125 defendants, 52 are being prosecuted by the Pemiscot County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, 19 are being prosecuted by the Dunklin County Prosecuting Attorney's Office, 22 are being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Missouri, 19 are being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Arkansas and 14 are being prosecuted by the Arkansas Second Judicial District's Prosecuting Attorney's Office. One defendant is being prosecuted in two jurisdictions.

The agencies involved in the investigation are the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the Caruthersville (Mo.) Police Department; the Steele (Mo.) Police Department; the Bootheel Drug Task Force; the Arkansas Second Judicial Drug Task Force; the Kennett (Mo.) Police Department; the Hayti (Mo.) Police Department; the Pemiscot County (Mo.) Sheriff's Department; the Blytheville (Ark.) Police Department; the Osceola (Ark.) Police Department and the Mississippi County (Ark.) Sheriff's Department. This enforcement operation involved law enforcement officers from all of the investigating agencies along with the Arkansas State Police.

“As I said in October of 2011, our commitment to eradicating drug trafficking and violent crime has never been stronger,” stated United States Attorney Christopher R. Thyer. “In order to achieve the results we see today, it takes commitment from every law enforcement agency in the region. These large-scale investigations take time and teamwork. These indictments, arrests and seizures of weapons are proof that law enforcement in the Eastern District of Arkansas stands behind their commitment to the citizens of this region.”

"I want to thank the Bootheel Drug Task Force, Caruthersville Police Department, Hayti Police Department, Pemiscot County Sheriff's Department and ATF, for the countless hours spent during this two year investigation which has lead to the arrests of today," said Pemiscot County Prosecuting Attorney William Carter. "Drug abuse has become a huge issue in our community and it leads to a large percentage of the crime we have. Hopefully, the events of today will send a strong message that we intend to devote substantial resources towards the prosecution of drug related activity."

Dunklin County Prosecuting Attorney Stephen Sokoloff stated, "The arrests made today are good examples of what a regional approach to enforcement can accomplish. Criminals do not pay attention to state and county boundaries. Law enforcement needs to cooperate across those boundaries as well, in order to be able to effectively combat drug distribution in our region."

Scott Ellington, District Prosecuting Attorney for Arkansas's Second Judicial District said, "I want to thank our neighbors to the north from Dunklin and Pemiscot Counties, ATF and the US Attorney's Office for their assistance and cooperation in making this operation a success. I know the hard work our officers from the Second District Drug Task Force, working with the Blytheville and Osceola Police Departments and Mississippi County Sheriff's Office, put into this operation. I appreciate the many hours they spent away from their families and the risks they took to protect our community and make this happen."

“This investigation is a prime example of what happens when agencies work together to make their communities safer,” said ATF Special Agent in Charge Marino F. Vidoli. “ATF’s commitment to reducing violent crime begins with our relationships with our law enforcement partners.”

Pemiscot County Sheriff Tommy Greenwell said, “I am proud to be a part of this cooperative effort. This investigation will make a major impact to the firearms and drug related crime in Pemiscot County.”

“Today’s operation is an unprecedented level of cooperation between the participating law enforcement agencies that has essentially removed many boundaries that the criminals have exploited to commit crimes in our communities,” said Blytheville Police Chief Ross Thompson. The resources of the Blytheville Police Department are dedicated to making this the beginning of the end of criminal trafficking of drugs, firearms and the destruction they bring.”

“Operation H.I.T.S. is the result of countless man-hours of investigation, which resulted in numerous previous arrests and culminating in the arrests made today,” said Mississippi County Sheriff Dale Cook. “This operation is a direct result of the cooperation and coordination of many local, state and federal agencies working harmoniously together for the common cause of making our communities safer and protecting our most vital resource – our children. I wish to give my sincere thanks to all of the officers involved.”

Kennett Police Chief James Paine said “I would like to thank the men and women who have made today’s roundup possible. This investigation was made possible through a cooperative of local, county, state and federal law enforcement agencies working together to combat drug dealing, drug use and drug related crime in Kennett and in our region. I would also like to thank ATF for their leadership in this investigation. The Kennett Police Department has had a long lasting relationship with ATF and will continue this partnership in the future. Today’s operation marks a major blow to drug trafficking, use, abuse and drug related crime in our community and is just the beginning of stricter enforcement efforts in our city.”

“I am thankful to be a part of this operation,” said Hayti Police Chief Paul Sheckell. “This was a good collaborate effort between Federal, State and Local agencies to combat the production, sale and distribution of illegal drugs in our communities. This operation will have a direct impact on our community and through the hard work and dedication of the many officers involved these individuals will no longer be able to sell their drugs on our streets.”

Caruthersville Police Chief Tony L. Jones said "Today shows how working as a ‘team’, with multiple agencies and jurisdictions, truly helps combat crime throughout our cities, counties and states. With a special thank you to ATF, who made it possible for all the agencies to come together to make numerous arrest involving suspects whom were involved in the sales and transfers of illegal firearms, and illegal sales of narcotics in our communities. With this joint effort between the ATF, local agencies, counties and adjoining states, we were able to take a large number of suspected criminals off our streets, to make it safe for our families to live. We would like to send thanks to the men and women who dedicated a lot of hours to make this possible for our community."

“These arrests are a result of hard work done by the federal and local law enforcement agencies. This shows that with the multiple agencies working close together, gathering and sharing information of what great things can be accomplished. This is to show that illegal sales, possession of drugs and firearms will not be tolerated in our communities,” said Steele Police Chief Billy Joe Stanfield

These state and federal charges are allegations that a defendant has committed a crime. A defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove a defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

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