



News Release

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Feds indict 61 in multi-agency drug probe focusing on Los Angeles-area gangs *Operation "Red Rein" targeted gangs' key meth and cocaine suppliers*

LOS ANGELES – More than 800 federal and local law enforcement officers fanned out across the Southland Thursday morning in a massive takedown capping a three-year, multi-agency investigation that targeted major methamphetamine and cocaine suppliers to some of the most violent street gangs based in Los Angeles, Long Beach and La Puente.

Early this afternoon, 40 of the suspects facing federal charges in the case were in custody, with 35 being arrested this morning and five of the defendants already in jail. A total of 21 defendants named in federal indictments are still being sought. Additionally, one other individual was detained on a state parole violation. Besides the arrests, the Los Angeles City Attorney's Office filed a civil "abatement" lawsuit Thursday to shut down drug trafficking activities at a notorious hotel used as a hangout by a Harbor Area gang.

Thursday's arrests come after a federal grand jury returned six indictments that name a total of 61 defendants, many of them documented gang members, who allegedly trafficked in large quantities of cocaine and meth that various gangs resold. The charges in the indictments include conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine and cocaine as well as firearms violations. The federal defendants were expected to be arraigned in United States District Court Thursday afternoon.

"This collaborative law enforcement action began as an investigation into drug trafficking in Wilmington and expanded into a case that charges members of 10 different street gangs," said United States Attorney André Birotte Jr. "A federal grand jury has charged key players involved in the distribution of crack cocaine in Wilmington, large-scale methamphetamine dealers in La Puente, and gun traffickers."

The investigation leading to Thursday's enforcement action, which was called Operation "Red Rein," was spearheaded by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); and the Los Angeles Police Department.

Operation Red Rein began in the wake of the multi-agency “Ghost Town” investigation, which in 2007 resulted in the arrest of nearly four dozen drug dealers and weapons traffickers in the Wilmington area. The law enforcement agencies involved in Operation Red Rein initiated the probe three years ago to identify the origins of the cocaine being distributed as crack by two Harbor Area street gangs -- the East Side Pain and Waterfront Piru. Investigators identified traffickers who dealt pound quantities of methamphetamine and kilogram quantities of cocaine, much of which was converted into crack cocaine.

One federal indictment charges 40 defendants, many of whom are affiliated with the Wilmington-based East Side Pain street gang, with participating in a conspiracy to distribute powder cocaine and crack cocaine. Using a variety of investigative techniques -- including telephone wiretaps, informants and surveillance -- investigators determined that gang members were responsible for funneling hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of crack cocaine a month onto the streets of the Harbor Area. This indictment charges Trond Thomas Sr., an East Side Pain member, and Robert Lee Campbell Jr., a Waterfront Piru, both of whom allegedly purchased powder cocaine from defendant Jesus Lamberto Olea, who is a member of the East Side Wilmas. The crack cocaine indictment also charges Marcos Louie Gallardo, a Puente 13 member, with selling cocaine to Thomas, who allegedly converted the powder cocaine to crack cocaine.

During the investigation into cocaine trafficking in the Harbor Area, authorities learned that in addition to selling cocaine, Gallardo was also selling large quantities of methamphetamine in La Puente. This part of the investigation resulted in a second indictment that focuses on the Puente 13 gang and charges 18 defendants in a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine.

The six indictments include defendants who are members of East Side Wilmas, North Side Wilmas, Harbor City Crips, Compton Avenue Crips, Fruit Town Piru, El Monte Flores and Primera Flats.

“As a result of this investigation and enforcement action, we’ve dismantled an entire drug trafficking network, from the street dealer to the actual supplier,” said Claude Arnold, special agent in charge for the ICE Office of Homeland Security Investigations in Los Angeles. “We believe these defendants were responsible for funneling large quantities of cocaine and methamphetamine into our communities. With today’s arrests, we’ve shut down that potentially deadly supply chain and cut off what was a key source of cash for some of the most ruthless and violent gangs operating in this area.”

The six federal indictments charge a total of 61 defendants – 58 of whom face mandatory minimum sentences of either 10 or 20 years in federal prison.

“Today’s operation is an outstanding example of the police partnerships working to successfully improve the quality of life in the communities we serve,” said Los Angeles Deputy Chief of Police Pat Gannon, Operations-South Bureau. “This is the culmination of a long-term partnership with law enforcement agencies which significantly reduced the operations of a number of street gangs operating the Harbor Area of Los Angeles. Our message to gang members in LA is this -- don’t underestimate the will of law enforcement to put you in jail. We will take as much time and effort necessary to make sure your criminal enterprises are ended.”

“I am so very proud that even in these times of extraordinarily tight budgets, this broad coalition of law enforcement agencies was able to work together to get the job done and to provide meaningful help to communities like Wilmington, which for too long has been plagued by gang violence and drug dealing,” said Los Angeles City Attorney Carmen Trutanich. “Our abatement cases against known gang hangouts will work in concert with the law enforcement action today in order to ensure these criminals are no longer able to find a safe haven from which to terrorize our citizens.”

In addition to making the arrests, federal and local investigators executed federal and state search warrants Thursday related to the case at residences throughout the greater Los Angeles area. Those searches resulted in the discovery of a meth lab, more than 1.5 pounds of meth, five pounds of marijuana, nearly 100 marijuana plants, more than \$20,000 in cash, and four firearms, including a shotgun. Prior enforcement actions in the investigation resulted in the seizure of more than 54 pounds of meth, more than six pounds of crack cocaine, more than five pounds of powder cocaine and 17 weapons.

“ATF is on the front line combating violent crime and will continue to actively pursue criminals that use firearms in their illegal activity as seen with today’s arrests,” said John A. Torres, special agent in charge, ATF Los Angeles. “This was a great collaboration by investigating the ‘worst of the worst’ which removed 17 firearms from the neighborhoods that were used in crimes of violence and as tools of the trade by drug traffickers.”

The three lead agencies in the investigation received substantial assistance during the case and with Thursday’s operation from U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations; the U.S. Marshals Service; the California Highway Patrol; the sheriff’s departments of Los Angeles and Riverside counties; and the Anaheim, Azusa, Baldwin Park, Costa Mesa, Fontana, Long Beach, Montclair, Montebello and West Covina police departments.

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