



NEWS RELEASE

Joint Investigation Knocks-out Two Los Angeles Area Gangs

59 Individuals Indicted and the Seizure of Drugs, Guns and Cash

LOS ANGELES, CA – The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) today announced the results of Operation Wasteland, a joint investigation aimed at rooting out major methamphetamine traffickers and busting key area gangs. So far, 24 search warrants have been executed, 31 individuals have been arrested, and eight pounds methamphetamine, one pound of cocaine, 23 vehicles, 14 firearms and approximately \$90,000 drug proceeds have been seized.

Information gathered during the investigation revealed that the Highland Park Gang (HLP) and the Eastside Wilmas Gang (ESW) were involved in drug trafficking to finance their gang activities. The total membership of the two gangs is approximately 650 members. HLP and ESW members and associates were responsible for trafficking approximately 500-800 pounds of methamphetamine monthly. During the course of this investigation, law enforcement identified Richard Gastelum as the leader of HLP, and quickly determined that Gastelum was financing HLP activities through the sale of methamphetamine. Gastelum would coordinate HLP activities from his residence in Covina, California.

“Drugs don’t traffic themselves; to penetrate our neighborhoods, they depend on gang members like the ones we arrested today,” said Acting Special Agent in Charge Ralph W. Partridge. “For too long, gangs have run roughshod in our neighborhoods, turning them, truly, into their own private wastelands. Today, we are cleaning them up.”

Operation Wasteland is comprised of two linked investigations, Operation Daddy Day Care targeting HLP and Operation Snow Globe targeting ESW. These investigations revealed that both gangs are involved with the same drug network and share common drug sources of supply.

“Gangs have caused too much violence and too much suffering,” said United States Attorney Debra Wong Yang. “Under the Justice Department’s anti-gang initiative, we will continue to attack the problem with all of our resources and all of our available tools. While the arrests today will not solve the gang problem, they are a significant step towards the long-term goal of making the streets of Los Angeles safe for every citizen.”

Operation Daddy Day Care targeted the HLP which was formed in the early 1970’s and has approximately 150 members. The HLP is involved in murder, robbery and grand theft, and witness intimidation. During the course of this investigation, 44 individuals were arrested resulting in the seizure of approximately 60 pounds of “ice” methamphetamine, 12 pounds of cocaine, 14 grams of heroin, 50 firearms, nine vehicles and over \$270,000 in drug proceeds.

“This case exemplifies law enforcement's dedication to rid our communities of gangs and gang-related violent

crimes." said California Department of Justice Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement Chief John Gaines. "We are determined to combine our resources to end gang influences on our youth, and will continue to use every available resource of the Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement to attain this goal. This case required tremendous expertise from numerous local, State and Federal agencies, and they should all be commended."

Operation Snow Globe targeted ESW which was formed in the mid 1950's and has approximately 500 members divided into five cliques. The ESW largely finances their activities through drug trafficking. During the course of this investigation, 30 individuals were arrested resulting in the seizure of approximately 19 pounds of "ice" methamphetamine, 13 pounds of cocaine, seven guns, 12 vehicles and approximately \$340,000 in drug proceeds.

"This is not one dope dealer; this is not one crack house; this is the dismantling of a criminal enterprise," said Long Beach Police Chief Anthony Batts. "All of these suspects are career criminals with violent histories. They have victimized innocent people long enough and now it is time for them to be removed from our streets. The cooperative working relationship we have developed with other local, State and Federal law enforcement agencies allows us to impact violent crime on a scale that in the past was unattainable."

The Operation Wasteland investigation is part of DEA's "Street Light Initiative (SLI)." This DEA umbrella initiative is designed to shine light on the fact that street gangs, either large or small, destroy America's communities through the use of fear and intimidation in furtherance of their drug trafficking activities. The SLI was conceived last June when DEA led "Operations Silent Night," which resulted in the arrest of twenty-three members of the Vineland Boys street gang in Burbank – shutting down a drug trafficking organization charged with numerous violent crimes and the murder of a police officer in relation to a drug trafficking crime.

"Money is the fuel that drug dealers use to continue their criminal affairs" said Edward Hannon, Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation's acting Special Agent in Charge. "Drug trafficking and drug money laundering constitute a serious threat to our communities, to the integrity of our financial system, and to our national security. Like terrorism, these are global threats."

Those arrested today are among 59 individuals indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of conspiracy to distribute and possession with intent to distribute Methamphetamine and Cocaine.

The following offices contributed invaluable assistance to the successful outcome of this investigation: California Department of Justice Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement and Inland Crackdown Allied Task Force, Long Beach Police Department, Los Angeles Police Department, Internal Revenue Service – Criminal Investigation, Southern California Drug Task Force, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Glendale Police Department, Los Angeles Interagency Metropolitan Police Apprehension Crime Task Force, Buena Park Police Department, Gardena Police Department, South Gate Police Department, California Highway Patrol, Covina Police Department, Baldwin Park Police Department, California Department of Corrections, Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, Redlands Police Department, Anaheim Police Department, U.S. Marshal's Service, Ontario Police Department, Riverside County Sheriff's Department, Riverside Police Department, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Please direct any questions to DEA Los Angeles Public Information Officer Sarah Fenno at (213) 621-6827.

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