

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Croix Man Pleads Guilty to Drug Conspiracy After Attempting to Smuggle Cocaine Through St. Croix Airport

Saldana and Torres apprehended during Spirit Airlines boarding process with 8 kilograms of cocaine

Crime / **Published On May 07, 2024 06:09 AM /**

Staff Consortium **May 07, 2024**



Saldana and Torres apprehended during Spirit Airlines boarding process with 8 kilograms of cocaine By. V.I. CONSORTIUM

ST. CROIX — Edward Saldana, 37, of St. Croix, has pleaded guilty to a drug conspiracy charge, as announced by U.S. Attorney Delia L. Smith. The plea was entered before U.S. Magistrate Judge Emile Henderson III on April 23, 2024.

According to court documents, the case began on January 23, 2023, when Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) received a phone call from a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer stationed at the Henry E. Rohlsen Airport (HERA) on St. Croix. The officer reported that two travelers, Edward Saldana and Bianca Torres, had been detained during the inspection process on suspicion of drug smuggling while attempting to board a Spirit Airlines flight to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

An inspection of Torres' carry-on bag revealed an anomaly detected through X-ray screening, leading to the discovery of four kilograms of cocaine. Saldana's luggage was also inspected, and an additional four kilograms of cocaine were found. Further investigation revealed that Saldana had provided Torres with the cocaine earlier that day and had offered to pay her \$3,000 to smuggle the drugs to Florida.

Torres pleaded guilty on February 12, 2024, and her sentencing is scheduled for June 12, 2024. Saldana's sentencing is set for August 22, 2024. The final sentences will be determined by a federal district court judge after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

This case is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) operation, which aims to identify, disrupt, and dismantle high-level criminal organizations threatening the United States. The OCDETF program uses a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. More information can be found at <https://www.justice.gov/OCDETF>.

The case was investigated by Homeland Security Investigations and Customs and Border Protection and is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Rhonda Williams-Henry.