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## Coast Guard Seizes \$7.4 Million Worth of Cocaine Near St. Croix

**Coordinated multi-agency effort yields major drug seizure south of St. Croix, as Coast Guard and DEA collaborate in \$7.4 million cocaine bust**

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**Suspects were detained following a cocaine bust south of St. Croix on Friday, June 7, 2024. By. COAST GUARD**

The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Charles David Jr. offloaded 245 kilograms of cocaine and transferred custody of nine suspected smugglers to Drug Enforcement Administration authorities at Coast Guard Base San Juan, Puerto Rico, on Friday. The contraband had an estimated wholesale value of \$7.4 million.

The operation was a multi-agency effort involving the Coast Guard's Western Hemisphere Strategy, the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force Initiative, and Operation Unified Resolve. The DEA is leading the ongoing investigation.

The interdiction occurred in the early morning hours of June 3, 2023, when the Coast Guard Cutter Heriberto Hernández detected a suspicious vessel approximately 75 nautical miles south of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands. As the cutter approached, the occupants of the vessel began to jettison packages overboard. The Heriberto Hernández crew halted the vessel, onboard which nine men, claiming to be Venezuelan nationals, were detained. The Coast Guard crew retrieved 10 bales and two additional bags containing individual packages of cocaine.

The detainees and the seized drugs were subsequently transferred to the cutter Charles David Jr. for transport to San Juan, Puerto Rico, where they were handed over to the DEA.

Lt. Cmdr. Edward Kunigonis, Sector San Juan chief of enforcement, praised the collaborative effort: "We appreciate the efforts of Cutter Heriberto Hernández's crew as well as the work and collaboration of all other Coast Guard personnel, units, and partner agencies involved in this case. The daily work and collaboration with our federal, local, and regional partners is critical to achieving successful outcomes like in this case to help safeguard the Caribbean region from this threat."

DEA Special Agent in Charge Denise Foster emphasized the importance of such operations, stating, "Today's successful interdiction and seizure underscore the relentless commitment and collaboration of our federal, local, and regional partners in combating drug trafficking in the Caribbean. The efforts of the Coast Guard and all agencies involved in this operation are vital to our mission of safeguarding our communities from the scourge of narcotics."

The Caribbean Corridor Strike Force, part of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area and Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, includes multiple agencies like HSI, the FBI, CBP, and local law enforcement, all working together to disrupt major drug trafficking organizations that use the Caribbean as a transshipment point to the United States.