

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Jet Ski Cocaine Trafficker Pleads Guilty in St. Thomas Smuggling Case

Emmanuel Rodriguez-Rodriguez admitted to his role in a 2021 drug operation between Culebra and St. Thomas. The jet ski-based scheme involved 26 kilograms of cocaine and multiple defendants facing up to life imprisonment

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ST. THOMAS — Emmanuel Rodriguez-Rodriguez, a 33-year-old resident of Puerto Rico, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute cocaine in a case involving a jet ski-based drug smuggling operation. The guilty plea was entered before United States Magistrate Judge G. Alan Teague on December 9, 2024. The announcement was made by U.S. Attorney Delia L. Smith.

Rodriguez-Rodriguez was among a group of defendants indicted for the cocaine trafficking operation, which took place on December 11, 2021, between Culebra, Puerto Rico, and St. Thomas. The co-defendants named in the case are Jose Torres-Russi, Ben Carrasquillosanto, Jose Martes-Gonzalez, Wilfredo Vazquez-Lopez, Jonathan Fernandez Montesino, Esteban Borrone Diaz, Smarling Villilo De Los Santo, and Guillermo Morales. If convicted, each defendant faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 10 years and up to life imprisonment. The final sentence will be determined by a federal district judge based on the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Court records show that on December 11, 2021, officers from Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations observed four jet skis traveling from Culebra, Puerto Rico, toward Mermaid's Chair Beach in Botany Bay, St. Thomas. At the beach, four individuals were waiting to receive the shipment. Officers saw duffle bags being loaded onto the jet skis before they sped back in the direction of Culebra.

A red Jeep Wrangler was noted as the only vehicle parked at Mermaid's Chair Beach during the transaction. The officers pursued the jet skis, and one of the operators abandoned his vehicle and fled on foot, leaving behind a duffle bag containing 26 kilograms of cocaine. Authorities later apprehended jet ski operators Jose Torres-Russi, Ben Carrasquillosanto, and Jose Martes-Gonzalez.

The remaining six defendants, including Rodriguez-Rodriguez, were arrested by federal agents as they tried to leave the gated community at Botany Bay. During the arrests, agents discovered two Glock pistols, one of which had an obliterated serial number, inside the defendants' vehicle.

The investigation was conducted by Customs and Border Protection Air and Marine Operations, the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), and Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Kyle Payne.

This effort is part of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) program. The OCDETF initiative focuses on identifying, disrupting, and dismantling high-level criminal organizations through a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach. More information on the OCDETF program can be found at www.justice.gov/OCDETF.