

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Coast Guard Offloads Over \$1.2 Million Worth Of Marijuana On St. Croix; 7 Venezuelans Detained

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ST. CROIX -- Felix Gomez, 37; Roman Jose Aguilera Gig, 37; Jesus Garcia, 34; Rosauro Morao, 47; Manuel Rodriguez, 51; Juan Rodriguez, 25,; and Jhoan Gomez, 28, all of Venezuela, made their initial appearances today before U.S. Magistrate Judge George W. Cannon, Jr., after being charged in a complaint with conspiracy to possess controlled substance on board a vessel, and possession of controlled substances on board a vessel, Acting United States Attorney Joycelyn Hewlett announced. A detention hearing is scheduled for May 23.

According to court records, during the afternoon of May 8, a suspicious go-fast vessel was detected by a maritime patrol aircraft in international waters off Martinique. The

Coast Guard out of San Juan interdicted the go-fast, detained the seven men onboard and seized multiple bales, which tested positive for marijuana. The Coast Guard transported the seven men and approximately 573 pounds of marijuana to St. Croix on Thursday, May 11, according to Hewlett.

According to the Coast Guard, the offload follows a recent at sea interdiction in international waters off the French Caribbean island of Martinique. The seized marijuana is estimated to have a wholesale value of approximately \$1.2 million dollars.

“Thanks to the interagency cooperation and strong regional partnerships we succeeded in stopping this illegal drug smuggling venture and bringing seven suspected smugglers to justice,” said Cmdr. Christopher Douglas, Sector San Juan chief of response.

If convicted of conspiracy to possess controlled substances and possession of controlled substances on board a vessel, each defendant faces a maximum sentence of 15 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

The interdiction was the result of ongoing, multi-agency and international law enforcement efforts in support of Operation Unified Resolve and Operation Caribbean Guard. The case is being investigated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the United States Coast Guard. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Rhonda Williams-Henry.

Acting United States Attorney Hewlett reminds the public that a complaint is merely a formal charging document and is not evidence of guilt. Every defendant is presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty.