

The Virgin Islands Consortium

CBP, FBI Seize 292 lbs. Of Cocaine Inside Vessel Leaving U.S. Virgin Islands Towards Puerto Rico

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ST. THOMAS -- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) [Air and Marine Operations \(AMO\)](#) agents along with agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) seized 292 pounds (132 kilos) of cocaine concealed inside two hidden compartments in a vessel intercepted leaving from St. Thomas, Virgin Islands, towards Puerto Rico.

On Feb.1, a federal grand jury in the District of Puerto Rico returned an indictment against four defendants charged with Conspiracy to Possess with the Intent to Distribute Cocaine and Conspiracy to Import a Controlled Substance, announced Rosa Emilia Rodríguez-Vélez, United States Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico.

“AMO crews remain vigilant of any attempts to smuggle narcotics through various maritime routes and work with our partners to deter them,” said Johnny Morales, Director of Air Operations.

On Jan. 27, a CBP St. Thomas Marine Unit intercepted a vessel after it had left Crown Bay Marina in the United States Virgin Islands (USVI). The vessel navigated towards Puerto Rico.

Due to the rough sea conditions, the crew escorted the vessel back to the Crown Bay cruise ship dock in the USVI where a CBP K9 inspected the vessel. During a subsequent inspection of the vessel, agents discovered a hidden compartment inside the vessel. Inside this hidden compartment, agents recovered approximately 55 brick shaped objects, which later tested positive for the characteristics of cocaine.

On Jan. 28, the FBI with the help of the United States Attorney's Office in the District of the Virgin Islands obtained a search warrant for the vessel. During a thorough search of the vessel, St. Thomas Marine Unit agents found an additional 56 brick shaped objects, which later tested positive for the characteristics of cocaine. The kilograms of cocaine were located in a hidden compartment under the carpet holding a bolted down table in the bow of the vessel.

At the time of the interdiction, there were four individuals on board, all of whom were indicted in the District of Puerto Rico: Maximiliano Fígaro-Benjamín and Emiliano Fígaro-Benjamín, United States Permanent Resident Card holders from the Dominican Republic; Alexandria Andino-Rodríguez, a United States Citizen; and Katerin Martinez-Alberto, a United States Permanent Resident Card holder from Switzerland.

A total of 111 bricks of cocaine were seized from the defendants, weighing 292 pounds (132 kilos). The estimated wholesale value of the narcotics is over \$5 million.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is in charge of the investigation along with agents from the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force (CCSF), with the collaboration of the United States Coast Guard (USCG), U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Office of Field Operations (OFO), CBP Air and Marine Operations (CBP AMO), CBP United States Border Patrol (CBP USBP), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and PR Joint Forces of Rapid Action (FURA). The CCSF is an initiative of the U.S. Attorney's Office created to disrupt and dismantle major drug trafficking organizations operating in the Caribbean. CCSF is part of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), which investigates South American-based drug trafficking organizations responsible for the movement of multi-kilogram quantities of narcotics using the Caribbean as a transshipment point for further distribution to the United States. The initiative is composed of DEA, HSI, FBI, US Coast Guard, US Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico, and PRPD's Joint Forces for Rapid Action.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Stuart J. Zander and Laura Montes are in charge of the prosecution of the case, under the supervision of Assistant U.S. Attorney Julia Díaz-Rex, Deputy Chief of the International Narcotics Unit.

If convicted the defendants face a minimum sentence of 10 years, and up to life in prison. Indictments contain only charges and are not evidence of guilt. Defendants are presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty.

