

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Six Members Of Venezuelan-Sourced Maritime Cocaine Smuggling Operation Convicted By St. Croix Jury

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ST. CROIX -- Following an eight-week re-trial, a St. Croix federal jury convicted six defendants on cocaine conspiracy and drug distribution charges, United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced today. Defendants Sergio Quinones-Davila, 43, of Orlando, Fla., Jose Hodge, 38, of St. Croix, and Omi Guitierrez-Calderon, 38, Anibal VegaArizmendi, 28, Jean Carlos Vega-Arizmendi, 26, Jesus Burgos-Montanez, 31, all from Puerto Rico, were convicted on all counts.

According to trial testimony, the defendants were members of an international cocaine trafficking from 2014 through 2016. Members of the conspiracy routinely retrieved cocaine shipments transported from Venezuela to mid-sea locations just south of St.

Croix, where the cocaine was transferred to local vessels for transport into St. Croix. The cocaine was subsequently shipped to Puerto Rico for distribution.

Evidence at trial revealed that the organization planned for the retrieval of over 300 kilograms of cocaine during the period of the conspiracy. Approximately 223 kilograms of cocaine were actually distributed. Law enforcement efforts to interdict the drug shipments were successful, beginning in 2015. On November 14, 2015, law enforcement agents apprehended four members of the organization, including Hodge and Burgos, on a beach at Knight's Bay on St. Croix and seized 87 kilograms of cocaine packed in four suitcases.

"This is one of the most significant transnational cocaine conspiracy investigations in recent memory, where large quantities of cocaine from Venezuela were shipped through the Virgin Islands and on to Puerto Rico. Apprehension and conviction of these defendants makes clear that federal agents and prosecutors will aggressively pursue the drug traffickers that threaten our islands," said U.S. Attorney Shappert. She also praised the agents and prosecution team who worked to bring these defendants to justice.

Fourteen individuals were originally charged as part of the drug trafficking organization. Prior to trial six defendants entered guilty pleas and were sentenced.

Defendant Gutierrez-Calderon faces a sentence of imprisonment of 20 years to life and a fine of up to \$20,000,000. The remaining defendants face sentences of imprisonment of ten years to life and fines of up to \$10,000,000. Sentencings hearings for the defendants convicted at trial have been scheduled for October.

The case was investigated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Alphonso G. Andrews, Jr. and Everard E. Potter.