

# The Virgin Islands Consortium

## Venezuelan National Pleads Guilty To Possession Of A Controlled Substance On Board Vessel; He Faces 40 Years In Prison.

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ST. CROIX -- Juan Rodriguez, 26, of Venezuela, pleaded guilty today in District Court to one count of Possession of a Controlled Substance on Board a Vessel, United States Attorney Gretchen C.F. Shappert announced.

This federal offense carries a possible sentence of up to 40 years in prison, a maximum fine of up to \$5 million, and a term of supervised release of at least 2 years. Sentencing is set for December 12, 2018.

According to court documents, on May 8, 2017, at approximately 7:50 pm, a Joint InterAgency Task Force South Patrol Aircraft located a northbound go-fast vessel (GFV) approximately 105 nautical miles west of Martinique. The vessel was located in a known drug trafficking route. It contained multiple fuel barrels and suspicious packages visible on deck. The U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Donald Horsley was directed to intercept the vessel.

Upon arrival, the crew of the GFV was observed tossing the suspicious packages and fuel barrels overboard. Ultimately, the crew of the Cutter Donald Horsley recovered 8 packages, which contained approximately 162 kilograms of marijuana. The defendant was one of the 7 Venezuelan national crew onboard the GFV.

The case was investigated by the United States Coast Guard and the Drug Enforcement Administration. It was prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Daniel Huston.