

Colombians Sentenced for Smuggling 1,535 Kilograms of Cocaine Onboard a Semi-submersible Vessel

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ST. THOMAS — Colombian natives Freddy Montano Paz, 30, and Mariano Abregon, 33, were both sentenced before District Judge Robert A. Molloy to 60 months of incarceration on their convictions on conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute 1,535 kilograms, United States Attorney Gretchen Shappert announced today. Judge Molloy also sentenced Montano Paz and Abregon to five years of supervised release, removal from the United States after serving their sentences, and \$100 each for special assessments.

According to court records, on May 10, 2019, the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter HAMILTON sighted a self-propelled, semi-submersible vessel in international waters approximately 250 nautical miles Northwest of Esmeraldas, Ecuador. The semi-submersible was navigating on a westerly course in a known drug smuggling area, and displayed no indicia of nationality nor markings, or navigation

lights. More than eighty (80%) percent of the vessel was under the waterline. As they approached the semi-submersible, U.S. Coast Guard crew members observed its occupants throwing objects overboard. Four individuals onboard the semi-submersible were later identified as Freddy Montano Paz, Mariano Abregon, Calixto Tumbaco, and Hector Hernandez Saucedo. After recovering the jettisoned packages, U.S. Coast Guard crew members conducted an inspection of the vessel and recovered 40 bales which contained 1,535 kilograms of cocaine. Both Montano Paz and Abregon pleaded guilty to the conspiracy.

This case was investigated by the U.S. Coast Guard and DEA, and prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Delia L. Smith.

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