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Coast Guard and BVI Authorities Interdict Vessel Near Anegada Attempting to Smuggle \$51 Million Worth of Cocaine

Crime / **Published On September 04, 2021 12:37 AM /**

Staff Consortium **September 04, 2021**

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The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Richard Etheridge crew offloaded approximately 1,700 kilograms of seized cocaine at Coast Guard Base San Juan Friday By. U.S. COAST GUARD PHOTO

The U.S. Coast Guard has announced that the Coast Guard Cutter Richard Etheridge crew offloaded approximately 1,700 kilograms of seized cocaine at Coast Guard Base San Juan Friday, following the disruption go-fast vessel smuggling attempt by Coast Guard and British Virgin Islands authorities near Anegada, British Virgin Islands.

This disruption and seizure is the result of multi-agency efforts involving the Caribbean Border Interagency Group and the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force, the Coast Guard said. The seized cocaine has an estimated wholesale value of approximately \$51 million dollars.

According to the release, during a routine patrol the night of Aug. 27, the Coast Guard Cutter Richard Etheridge responded to the sighting of a suspect go-fast vessel, in waters northeast of the British Virgin Islands. Coast Guard watchstanders in Sector San Juan directed the launch of a Coast Guard MH-60T aircraft from Air Station Borinquen to vector cutter Richard Etheridge to the go-fast vessel's position. Additionally, Coast Guard and British Virgin Islands authorities maintained communication to interdict the suspect go-fast vessel.

As the cutter Richard Etheridge closed in on the go-fast vessel, the smugglers proceeded to jettison their cargo and flee the area at high speed. Afterwards, the Coast Guard helicopter crew proceeded to assist cutter Richard Etheridge in locating the jettisoned cargo. In total, the crew of cutter Richard Etheridge recovered 57 bales, which tested positive for cocaine.

“Despite the challenging sea state conditions and thanks to the close collaboration and coordination with our Royal Virgin Islands Police partners, our crews did an outstanding job in disrupting a major shipment of cocaine and keeping it from ever reaching the streets,” said Capt. Gregory H. Magee, Sector San Juan commander. “Our strong partnerships, as in the case of the British Virgin Islands and island nations throughout our area of responsibility, are key to achieving safe and secure maritime borders from drug trafficking and other smuggling threats in the Eastern Caribbean.”

“This is a great example of the close working relationship between the U.S. and the UK overseas territories,” said Detective Inspector Mike Jones, Head of Intelligence for the Royal Virgin Islands Police. “The excellent work of the U.S. Coast Guard forced the crew of the go-fast vessel to jettison their cargo. We will continue to work closely with all agencies and partners in order to disrupt and detect the movement of narcotics, illegal money and people trafficking.”