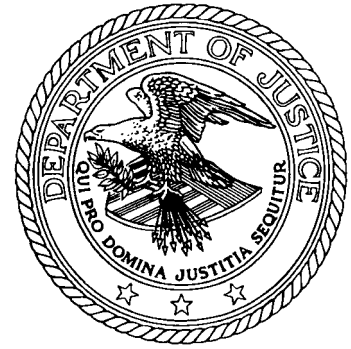


NEWS RELEASE



***OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES ATTORNEY
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA
San Diego, California***

***United States Attorney
Carol C. Lam***

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For Immediate Release

**FIVE YEAR SENTENCE FOR FORMER BORDER
PATROL AGENT INVOLVED IN DRUG
TRAFFICKING NEAR THE BORDER**

NEWS RELEASE SUMMARY – December 12, 2005

United States Attorney Carol C. Lam announced that Luis Francisco Higareda, a former United States Border Patrol Agent in the El Centro Sector, was sentenced today in federal court in San Diego to serve 60 months in custody, followed by five years of supervised release, and a \$5,000 fine by United States District Judge Larry A. Burn. Higareda pled guilty pursuant to a plea agreement to possession with intent to distribute approximately 749.7 pounds of marijuana.

According to court documents, on January 4, 2005, federal agents received a tip that a uniformed U.S. Border Patrol agent in a marked vehicle was going to pick up marijuana near the border. Several agencies, working together including the United States Border Patrol (USBP), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in El Centro, and the United States Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Inspector General (OIG) in El Centro, conducted surveillance at the suspected location provided by the tipster. At approximately

10:00 p.m., surveillance agents observed the driver, later identified as Luis Francisco Higareda, meet with other coconspirators, at which time, the coconspirators transferred ten duffle bags of marijuana into Higareda's marked vehicle. Luis Higareda was off-duty at the time of incident, but was wearing his Border Patrol uniform and driving a marked unit. Higareda was scheduled to work later that evening. After meeting with the coconspirators, Higareda drove his marked United States Border Patrol unit away from the border but was stopped without incident by USBP, FBI and OIG agents. The vehicle he was driving was found to contain approximately 749.7 pounds of marijuana, with an estimated street value of \$600,000.

Marcelino Verdugo, a passenger in the vehicle Higareda was driving, was also arrested and charged. Verdugo pled guilty and is awaiting sentencing, scheduled for January 3, 2006 at 9:30 a.m., before Judge Larry A. Burns.

United States Attorney Lam stated, "Nothing is more important to the security of the people of this community than the detection and prosecution of corrupt law enforcement agents. I commend the investigative work by the United States Border Patrol, Department of Homeland Security and the Federal Bureau of Investigation which led to this prosecution."

DEFENDANTS

Criminal Case Number: 05CR0159-LAB

Luis Higareda

Marcelino Verdugo

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Title 21, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1) – Possession of Marijuana with Intent to Distribute.
Maximum penalty per count: mandatory minimum term of 5 to 40 years in custody;
fine of \$2,000,000; four years of supervised release.

AGENCIES

Office of Inspector General, Department of Homeland Security
Federal Bureau of Investigation
U.S. Border Patrol