



# ATF News

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **ATF TEAMS UP WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT PARTNERS TO REDUCE VIOLENCE IN HOLLISTER**

HOLLISTER, Calif. – United States Attorney Scott Schools, Northern Judicial District of California, Special Agent in Charge Stephen K. Martin of the San Francisco Field Division, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); Sheriff Curtis Hill of the San Benito County Sheriff's Office, Chief Jeff Miller of the Hollister Police Department, Captain Brent Newman, Hollister-Gilroy Area Commander of the California Highway Patrol, Special Agent In Charge Bob Cooke, California Department of Justice, Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement (BNE), and Chief Investigator Laurel Robinson of California Department of Insurance (CDI), Fraud Division, San Jose Regional Office, announced today the arrest of 15 defendants in a sweep of narcotics traffickers, firearms traffickers, and car thieves operating in and around the Hollister area.

ATF special agents, CHP investigators, BNE agents, CDI investigators and members of the Unified Narcotics Enforcement Team (UNET) initiated an undercover investigation in 2005 targeting suspects trafficking in illegal firearms and narcotics, and selling stolen vehicles in and around the Hollister area. The 23 month investigation, dubbed "Operation Steal Curtain," culminated this week with the service of 12 federal arrest warrants and 7 state arrest warrants in the Hollister area.

During the course of the investigation, 25 firearms were recovered. In addition, various drugs were purchased and recovered, including cocaine, methamphetamine and marijuana. A number of the defendants are felons; some are documented gang members and associates.

"This investigation will make Hollister a safer community. I commend the dedication and hard work of the members of the Unified Narcotics Enforcement Team, CHP investigators, the Department of Insurance investigators and ATF Special Agents who worked to make a change in Hollister by removing the criminal element," said ATF's Stephen Martin.

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“Targeting violent offenders remains a high priority for the Justice Department. I commend the outstanding collaboration of the local, state and federal law enforcement in undertaking this sweeping investigation,” said United States Attorney Scott Schools.

“Working together, the U-NET, CHP, and ATF conducted this investigation, which will have an immediate impact, reducing the amount of narcotic and firearms-related crimes and violence in our neighborhoods,” said Sheriff Curtis Hill.

Chief Miller commended the more than 90 law enforcement personnel who participated in the roundup. Assisting ATF, San Benito County Sheriff’s Department, the Hollister Police Department, the California Highway Patrol and the Department of Insurance in the service of the warrants were: California Department of Justice, San Benito County District Attorney’s Office, San Benito Probation Department, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation

“Working together we have the ability to take criminal investigations to a higher level involving more sophisticated criminals. These arrests will provide a positive message to the citizens of San Benito County and a warning the lawbreakers within earshot of this media event,” said Bob Cooke of BNE.

“Operation Steal Curtain is an example of how allied agencies, including local, state and federal law enforcement agencies can collaborate and pool their resources to make a difference,” said CDI Chief Investigator Laurel Robinson.

The federal indictments include numerous charges: felon in possession of a firearm, possession of an unregistered firearm, distribution of methamphetamine and conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine. The state charges are predominantly possession for sales of methamphetamine, cocaine, marijuana and possession of illegal firearms. Additional state charges of possession and sales of stolen vehicles and insurance fraud are being sought.

The investigation is ongoing and arrests continue. An indictment contains only allegations against an individual, and, as with all defendants, the defendants must be presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty.

Tom O’Connell is the Assistant U.S. Attorney who is prosecuting the case.

For more information on ATF and additional programs designed to reduce violent crime, go to [www.atf.gov](http://www.atf.gov).

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