



Department of Justice

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FINAL DEFENDANTS SENTENCED IN "METH MERCHANT" CASES

Cases Contributed to Steep Decline in Meth Labs in Northwest Georgia

Rome, GA - MITESH PATEL, 29, of Ringgold, Georgia, and ALPESH PATEL, 31, of Rossville, Georgia, were sentenced by United States District Court Judge Harold Murphy on charges of distributing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine and other products that they knew would be used to manufacture methamphetamine, and on money laundering charges. The sentencing of MITESH PATEL and ALPESH PATEL end a two-year investigation into small convenience stores in Northwest Georgia that were providing the ingredients for individuals to "cook" methamphetamine.

United States Attorney David E. Nahmias said of the case, "This was a unique investigation that investigated small business owners hiding behind a veil of legitimacy, while they helped fuel the then-growing number of small toxic methamphetamine labs in the Northwest Georgia area. Meth and those who manufacture it pose great dangers to the community. In addition to meth being highly addictive and deadly, the manufacturing process - which often uses chemicals like lye, phosphorus, ethanol, acetone, and butane - creates poisonous gases which can cause injury and death, and presents a risk of explosion as well. Additionally, locations determined by law enforcement to have been used to "cook" meth must be treated as hazardous waste sites and cost thousands of dollars to clean up. The proliferation of these dangerous meth labs in Northwest Georgia was linked to these defendants."

Larry Black, Police Chief of Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, one of the areas targeted in the Meth Merchant investigation, said, "Our methamphetamine cases have declined. I think there are a number of factors that have influenced this trend, not the least of which are the Meth Merchant cases."

Sheriff Steve Wilson of Walker County, Georgia-another area that had experienced a proliferation of methamphetamine labs and that was targeted in Operation Meth Merchant-has seen a dramatic decrease in meth labs in his county. Wilson attributes this reduction in labs to "Operation Meth Merchant and the new Georgia laws that restrict the purchase of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine."

Rodney G. Benson, Special Agent in Charge of the DEA Atlanta Field Division said, “The Meth Merchant investigation focused on small retail establishments who exploited their positions as business owners, in the purchase and sale of precursor chemicals needed to make methamphetamine. In doing so, they assisted in the exponential growth of clandestine meth laboratories in the Northwest, Georgia area. Those who manufacture meth, because of its toxicity and volatility, pose a grave danger to everyone. This investigation had an invaluable impact on the sharp decrease in clandestine meth laboratories located in Northwest Georgia.”

MITESH PATEL and ALPESH PATEL cooperated in the government's investigation and received sentences of 2 years of probation to each include 4 months of home confinement.

According to Nahmias and the information presented in court: In only a period of 16 months starting in January 2004, 299 small toxic labs were reported to law enforcement in the Northwest Georgia area targeted in Operation Meth Merchant. After the investigation and arrests of the Meth Merchant defendants, in the following 16 months, law enforcement reported a 76 percent drop in meth labs, finding only 72 labs. The number of labs has plummeted to 22 labs reported since October 2006. Nahmias attributes this drop to the deterrent effect of the Meth Merchant investigation and prosecution and the new state and federal laws that limit access to products containing ephedrine and pseudoephedrine and the amount which can be purchased at one time by an individual.

During the course of this investigation, agents seized approximately 13 kilograms of pseudoephedrine and ephedrine, which could be used to “cook” approximately 14 pounds of meth. The estimated street value for 14 pounds of meth is \$663,000.

Other defendants who pleaded guilty and were sentenced in Operation Meth Merchant include:

PAT ALLEN, 73, of Gaylesville, Alabama; KAREN FLARITY, 50, of Mentone, Alabama; JUDY HIGDON, 55, of Trenton, Georgia; DAKSHA JANI, 34, of Dalton, Georgia; ASHLEY KNIGHT, 22, of Cedar Bluff, Alabama; TONYA LAYMAN, 34, of Trenton, Georgia; ALPESH PATEL, 31, of Rossville, Georgia; BALDEDBHAI PATEL, 43, of Chattanooga, Tennessee; BALWINDER PATEL, 50, of Marietta, Georgia; BARATKUMAR PATEL, 55, of Menlo, Georgia; FALGUN PATEL, 31, of Chattanooga, Tennessee; GHANSHYAMBHAI PATEL, 36, of Dalton, Georgia; HARSHADKUM PATEL, 28, of Centre, Alabama; JIGNESHKUMAR PATEL, 29, of Tifton, Georgia; LAXMANBHAI PATEL, 57, of Rossville, Georgia; MANGESH PATEL, 57, of Chattanooga, Tennessee; MITESH PATEL, 29, of Ringgold, Georgia; NIKESH PATEL, 34, of Marietta, Georgia; NILAMBEN BHARAT PATEL, 48, of Menlo, Georgia; NILESH R. PATEL, 36, of Silver Creek, Georgia; PARUL PATEL, 31, of Cloudland, Georgia; PRADIPKUMAR PATEL, 45, of Rossville, Georgia; PRAHLADBHAI PATEL, 49, of Dalton, Georgia; PRAVINKUMAR PATEL, 30, of Rome, Georgia; RAMESHBHAI PATEL, 56, of Dalton, Georgia; RUPESH

PATEL, 34, of Rome, Georgia; REMESH REKHA, 49, of Nashville, Tennessee; SATISHKUMAR PATEL, 50, of Cochran, Georgia; VIPUL PATEL, 38, of Calhoun, Georgia; VIPUL R. PATEL [29] of Rising Fawn, Georgia; SUDHIRKUMAR PATEL, 47, of Dalton, Georgia; and HASMUKH THANKI, 51, of Rossville, Georgia.

Corporations who pleaded guilty and were sentenced in Operation Meth Merchant include:

ANERI, CORP., d/b/a “Tobacco and Beverage Mart,” Trenton, Georgia; BABUBEN, INC., a/b/a “Coastal Food Mart,” Rome, Georgia; BDGK, INC., a/b/a “Tibbs Road Convenience Store,” Dalton, Georgia; 41 MARKET INC., d/b/a “41 Food Mart,” Resaca, Georgia; DIPESH, INC., d/b/a “Mom and Pop’s Store,” Lyerly, Georgia; HELLY, INC., d/b/a Reese’s Mini Mart, Summerville, Georgia; JAI GOPAL, INC., d/b/a “Creekside Grocery,” Dalton, Georgia; KASHIBA, INC., d/b/a “Deep Springs Grocery,” Dalton, Georgia; KARUNA NIDHI, INC., d/b/a “Myra’s Grocery and Tobacco,” Dalton, Georgia; NISHA, INC., d/b/a “A&W Mini Mart,” Ringgold, Georgia; PRB, Inc., d/b/a “Famous Market and Tobacco Store,” Flintstone, Georgia; SAISHREE, INC, d/b/a “Tobacco For Less,” Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia; SATU, INC., d/b/a “Tobacco Outlet,” Lafayette, Georgia; SHAKTHI, INC., d/b/a “Sue’s Market,” Rising Fawn, Georgia; SHREE DURGA, d/b/a “Varnell Market and Tobacco,” Varnell, Georgia.

No defendants elected to go to trial. The defendants who pleaded guilty were convicted of providing the ingredients for individuals to cook methamphetamine. The charges against 17 defendants were dismissed. Fourteen (14) dismissals were in connection with guilty pleas by more culpable relatives.

The defendants in this case received sentences ranging from 12 months on probation to 18 months in prison, and fines ranging from \$12,000 to \$36,000. In all, the government expects to collect over \$465,630 in fines from these defendants.

United State Attorney Nahmias urges any citizens who have information regarding the manufacture of methamphetamine or suspect methamphetamine is being manufactured in their neighborhoods to contact their local law enforcement agencies immediately.

This case was investigated by Special Agents of the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the Internal Revenue Service and detectives of the Catoosa County Sheriff’s Office. Also assisting in the investigation are: Chattooga County Sheriff’s Office; Dade County Sheriff’s Office; Dalton Police Department; Department of Homeland Security, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE); Federal Bureau of Investigation; Floyd County Police Department; Georgia Department of Corrections; Georgia Department of Family and Children Services; Georgia State Patrol; Lafayette Police Department; Murray County Sheriff’s Office; Rome/Floyd County Drug Task Force; Rome Police Department; Summerville Police Department; Trenton Police Department; Walker County Sheriff’s Office; and the Whitfield County Sheriff’s Office.

Assistant United States Attorneys Lisa W. Tarvin, Kurt R. Erskine, Jenny R. Turner and Evan Weitz prosecuted the cases.

The U.S. Attorney's Office in Atlanta recommends parents and children learn about the dangers of drugs at the following web site: www.justthinktwice.com.

For further information please contact David E. Nahmias (pronounced NAH-me-us), United States Attorney or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.usdoj.gov/usao/gan.