



NEWS RELEASE

April 1, 2005

## 70 INDICTED ON FEDERAL GUN, DRUG CHARGES

### Roundup part of effort to combat violent crime in Columbus

COLUMBUS, OH – Teams of Columbus Police officers, agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Deputy U.S. Marshals, and officers of the Ohio Adult Parole Authority today began arresting 70 people named in 23 indictments returned by a federal grand jury here. The individuals are charged with firearm crimes and drug trafficking. Some of the charges carry a potential term of life imprisonment. All but four defendants face mandatory minimum sentences of at least five years in federal custody, if convicted.

U.S. Deputy Attorney General James Comey; Carl J. Truscott, Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; Gregory G. Lockhart, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio; James Wahrab, U.S. Marshal, Southern District of Ohio; Franklin County Prosecutor Ron O'Brien; and Columbus Police Chief James G. Jackson announced the indictments today.

The charges are the result of an investigation by Columbus Police and ATF agents into drug and violent crimes in west Columbus neighborhoods. Those arrested will be placed in the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service and appear before a U.S. Magistrate Judge for their initial appearance on the charges.

The investigation is part of a nationwide initiative by federal, state and local law enforcement agencies to reduce violent crimes in communities through Violent Crime Impact Teams (VCIT). The goal of the teams is to identify and arrest the most violent offenders in the city.

At least 20 individuals are charged with use of a firearm in a drug trafficking crime, which carries a penalty of at least five years imprisonment and up to 25 years for each count, depending on the defendant's prior criminal record.

"Today, thanks to the hard work of dozens of dedicated professionals in the VCIT program, we closed down a virtual criminal corner store," said Deputy Attorney General James Comey. "This is the largest case ever brought under the nationwide VCIT program, and it has made the streets of Columbus that much safer."

"The VCIT initiative has had real success here in Columbus," Director Truscott said. "As of March 21, VCIT members have arrested 465 individuals allegedly involved in criminal incidents, and have recovered 443 firearms. That's 443 firearms out of the hands of criminals and no longer a threat to this community."

- MORE -

“We know that more than half the homicides nationally are committed by someone with a prior record of violent crime,” Lockhart said. “We want to focus on keeping guns out of the hands of violent or repeat offenders as a way to make our communities safer.”

“The cooperation demonstrated between these agencies is encouraging,” Chief Jackson said. “We believe that these arrests will have a ripple effect and reduce the overall crime in the community.”

In Columbus, the Columbus Division of Police and the Franklin County Prosecutor are leading this initiative for local agencies in the area.

Other participating agencies include Franklin County Sheriff Jim Karnes’s Office, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Ohio Bureau of Criminal Identification and Investigation in Attorney General Jim Petro's Office, and the Ohio Adult Parole Authority.

The Columbus VCIT effort began in June 2004 with a focus on removing crime guns from the streets. Teams of law enforcement officers, federal and state prosecutors meet regularly to review cases involving firearms. Decisions are made jointly on whether to prosecute a criminal through the state or federal system, depending on the evidence and on which system could provide the harsher punishment.

Prior to today’s arrests, the team had made more than 450 arrests on state charges and caught more than 60 fugitives wanted on felony charges.

An indictment is merely an accusation. All defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty in court.

####

Source: Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) & US Attorney, Southern District of Ohio

Contact:

Fred Alverson,  
U.S. Attorney’s Office  
(614) 469-2057 ext 1604

Patrick Berarducci  
Senior Special Agent, ATF  
(614) 496-4518

Sgt. Brent Mull or Sherry Mercurio  
Columbus Division of Police  
(614) 645-4593