



NEWS RELEASE

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NOVEMBER 4, 2005
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OPERATION ICE STORM
TWO DEFENDANTS SENTENCED IN METH CONSPIRACY

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that two defendants have been sentenced in federal court for participating in a conspiracy that is believed to have distributed at least 15 kilograms of methamphetamine in Jasper County, Mo.

Operation Ice Storm, Graves explained, is a multi-agency investigation into an organization based in Mexico that is distributing multi-kilogram amounts of methamphetamine throughout southwest Missouri and Texas.

Melanie Fortner, 40, of Joplin, Mo., was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Fernando J. Gaitan on Thursday to 15 years and eight months in federal prison without parole.

On Feb. 18, 2005, **Fortner** pleaded guilty to her role in the conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine from February 2004 to May 6, 2004, in Jasper County. **Fortner** admitted that she obtained methamphetamine from **Manuel Villareal-Amarillas**, 48, an illegal alien from Mexico, which she distributed to others in the Jasper County area. **Fortner** assisted **Villareal-Amarillas** in his drug trafficking activities by recording his drug transactions. **Fortner** also admitted that she assisted **Olegario Villareal**, 26, also an illegal aliens from Mexico, in the same fashion, by recording drug transactions and collecting drug debts owed to **Villareal-Amarillas**.

Fortner admitted that members of the conspiracy distributed in excess of 15 kilograms of methamphetamine.

Brian C. Valentine, 36, of Seneca, Mo., was sentenced by U.S. District Judge Fernando J. Gaitan on Thursday to 13 years and four months in federal prison without parole. The court also ordered **Valentine** to forfeit to the government \$3,959, which was obtained from methamphetamine sales.

On Nov. 19, 2004, **Valentine** pleaded guilty to his role in the methamphetamine conspiracy. **Valentine** admitted that he obtained supplies of methamphetamine from co-conspirators, which he re-distributed to others in the southwest Missouri area. During the course of the conspiracy, **Valentine** admitted, members of the conspiracy distributed in excess of 15 kilograms of methamphetamine. **Valentine** also admitted that on March 11, 2004, he was in possession of 166 grams of methamphetamine, packaged in 11 individual baggies for distribution.

Fortner and **Valentine** are among six co-defendants charged in an Aug. 11, 2004, federal indictment, all of whom have been sentenced.

Villareal-Amarillas was sentenced on Aug. 16, 2005, to 27 years and four months in federal prison without parole. **Villareal-Amarillas** has forfeited to the government \$78,870, which was derived from the sale of methamphetamine and which was seized by law enforcement officers on March 17, 2004. **Villareal-Amarillas** pleaded guilty on March 3, 2005, to his role in the conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine.

Villareal-Amarillas was the organizer or leader of the methamphetamine conspiracy. **Villareal-Amarillas** admitted that he obtained supplies of methamphetamine from an unknown source, which he redistributed to others in the southwest Missouri area for redistribution.

Villareal was sentenced to five years and 10 months in federal prison without parole. **Villareal** pleaded guilty on March 3, 2005, to his role in the conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine.

Villareal, the son of **Villareal-Amarillas**, admitted that he came to Jasper County for the purpose of taking over his father's drug distribution activities after his father's arrest on March 17, 2004. **Villareal** collected drug debts owed to his father from previous drug sales, and continued supplying members of the organization with methamphetamine for re-distribution. During the course of his involvement in the conspiracy, **Villareal** admitted, he was aware that at least 500 grams but less than 1.5 kilograms of methamphetamine were distributed by members of the organization.

Villareal also pleaded guilty to illegal re-entry, admitting that he entered the United States illegally sometime after May 21, 1999, and was found in Newton County, Mo., on April 15, 2004. This marked at least the third occasion that **Villareal** entered the country illegally, Graves said. **Villareal** had been removed from the United States on Jan. 7, 1998, when he attempted to enter the country under an assumed name in San Diego, Calif. In addition, **Villareal** was removed from the United States on May 21, 1999, when he attempted to enter the country under an assumed name at San Ysidro, Calif.

Mark Walker, 44, of Joplin, Mo., was sentenced on Aug. 16, 2005, to 19 years and seven months in federal prison without parole. **Walker** pleaded guilty on March 3, 2005, to his role in the conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine.

Juan H. Gonzalez, 22, of Carthage, Mo., was sentenced on Aug. 16, 2005, to 12 years and seven months in federal prison without parole. The court also ordered **Gonzalez** to forfeit to the government a total of \$28,556 in proceeds from the sale of methamphetamine, which was seized by law enforcement officers on three separate occasions from his residence, vehicle and hotel room. Officers also seized firearms and items indicative of methamphetamine trafficking from **Gonzalez's** residence and vehicle. **Gonzalez** pleaded guilty on March 3, 2005, to his role in the conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine.

Gonzalez and **Walker** admitted that they received supplies of methamphetamine from co-conspirators, which they re-distributed to others in the southwest Missouri area.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Robyn L. McKee. It was investigated by the Jasper County Drug Task Force; the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement; the Drug Enforcement Administration; the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives; the Newton County, Mo., Sheriff's Department; the Joplin, Mo., Police Department; the Jasper County, Mo., Sheriff's Department; the Barton County, Mo., Sheriff's Department and the Carthage, Mo., Police Department.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

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