

Michele M. Leonhart
Operation Xcellerator Press Conference
Department of Justice
Washington, D.C.
February 25, 2009, 2:00 pm

The Acting Administrator often departs from her prepared remarks

Today we have dealt the Sinaloa Drug Cartel a crushing blow in one of the largest joint international law enforcement efforts ever undertaken. As a result of this operation they've been hit hard, and their ability to spread death and destruction has been diminished.

We are here today to tell you what we're doing to stop them.

The Sinaloa Cartel is a Mexican based drug organization that dominates much of the drug smuggling on the Southwest Border.

The Cartel, which is also known as The Federation, was founded some 35 years ago and has evolved into one of the largest organized crime syndicates in the world. Due to their ruthless desire to expand, and the successful efforts of law enforcement to curtail them, the Sinaloa Cartel has violently lashed out, and is responsible for much of the upsurge in violence taking place in Mexico today.

Operation Xcellerator began in Imperial County, California, 21 months ago. As a result of investigations that followed, we connected the dots to 70 distribution cells of the Sinaloa Cartel in communities in 26 states, from Washington State to Maine.

DEA and our partners took down the Cartel's operatives in big cities like New York, Baltimore, and Los Angeles, but also in small towns like Brockton, Massachusetts; Lancaster, Pennsylvania; and Stow, Ohio.

For example consider the case of Stow, in Northeastern Ohio. This is a suburban community of 35,000 known for its small businesses, good schools, and universities that became a conduit for criminals running cocaine.

Just underneath the surface of this peaceful city, the Sinaloa Cartel had been sending cocaine through this community's airport, regularly ferrying dozens of kilos of cocaine from California to Stow on a regular basis.

This cocaine ended up not just on the streets of larger cities like Cleveland and Columbus, but also in surrounding small towns, and onto the campuses of schools in the region.

The spread of the Sinaloa Cartel is a direct threat to the safety and security of law-abiding citizens everywhere. The money generated from their sales of illegal drugs is used to fund other criminal activities, extending their violent enterprises further into our heartland.

Consider that:

- The Cartels that are making life unbearable in border towns in Mexico are contributing to trafficker violence in the United States;
- As part of Operation Xcellerator, we seized more than 150 weapons. These weapons would have stayed in the community, or been shipped across the border;
- In places like San Diego, our investigations led to the arrest of violent, career criminals with ties to the Sinaloa Cartel;
- And just 40 miles from here in Baltimore, we took down violent drug traffickers which were supplied with hundreds of kilos of cocaine from Mexico.

We've seen clearly through this operation the added value we bring in the broader fight against gangs and gang violence across our country.

During this operation we also saw the extent and scope of the Sinaloa Cartel's international network, including multi-hundred kilo cocaine shipments to traffickers in Canada; a super meth lab that's as sophisticated as we've seen anywhere; and presses capable of producing 12,000 ecstasy pills an hour.

Operation Xcellerator stunted, and in many cases shut down their networks in the United States, Canada, and Mexico, and led to the arrest of traffickers with ties to countries around the world.

The reach of their networks meant we needed to enhance our local and global collaboration, and we have. Operation Xcellerator is an example of the extraordinary level of cooperation now taking place between law enforcement agencies in the United States, and with our international partners. DEA is working with our courageous colleagues in Mexico like never before to hit the cartels hard.

We know the impact of our enforcement is being felt:

- Since the beginning of 2007, cocaine prices have more than doubled, while purity has dropped by more than a third.
- With this operation we have denied the Sinaloa Cartel and its networks nearly \$1 billion in drug revenue. And,
- We've arrested over 750 drug traffickers as part of Operation Xcellerator.

We are committed to defeating those that thrive on the suffering of others, and we are determined to take away from them not just their drugs, but their money, and their freedom.

DEA will continue attacking the international drug trade with every tool at our disposal—fighting to defeat those who put deadly drugs on our streets and engage in violence in our communities.

Rest assured that, while this is DEA's biggest operation against the Sinaloa Cartel and their networks to date, it won't be our last. ##