



PRESS RELEASE

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**FOUR ALBUQUERQUE RESIDENTS ARRESTED IN CONNECTION WITH
NATIONWIDE SYNTHETIC DESIGNER DRUG TAKEDOWN**

***48 Search and Seizure Warrants Executed at Businesses,
Residences and Other Locations Throughout New Mexico***

ALBUQUERQUE – U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales and Joseph M. Arabit, Special Agent in Charge of the El Paso Division of the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), announced that yesterday four Albuquerque residents were arrested as part of the first-ever nationwide law enforcement action against the synthetic designer drug industry responsible for the production and sale of dangerous and deadly drugs that are often marketed as bath salts, Spice, incense, or plant food. The enforcement action also included the execution of 48 federal search and seizure warrants at businesses, residences and other locations throughout New Mexico.

DEA and its partners pursued cases in more than 80 U.S. cities that targeted every level of the synthetic designer drug industry, including retailers, wholesalers, and manufacturers. Homeland Security Investigations, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigations, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol, and the U.S. Postal Inspection Service also participated in Operation Log Jam, which resulted in more than 90 arrests and the seizure of more than five million packets of finished designer synthetic drugs nationwide.

Yesterday morning, DEA agents arrested Raid “Ray” Rihani, 48, Hussein Al-Omari, 31, Thaeir Rihani, 36, and Maher Alzein, 36, all residents of Albuquerque, as part of the nationwide takedown. Raid Rihani is a Jordanian citizen who is legally in the U.S. on an investor work visa. Al-Omari and Thaeir Rihani are lawful permanent residents, and Alzein is a naturalized U.S. citizen.

The four men made their initial appearances in federal court in Albuquerque yesterday afternoon. They are scheduled to be back in court on Friday, July 27, 2012 for arraignment and detention hearings. They will be arraigned on an indictment charging them with conspiracy to distribute cannabinoids and cathinones, commonly referred to as Spice and bath salts, respectively, in Bernalillo County from Feb. 2012 through July 2012. The indictment also seeks

forfeiture of property constituting proceeds from, or proceeds obtained, from the unlawful activity alleged in the indictment, including real property located in northwest Albuquerque. It also seeks a money judgment in the amount of \$1.6 million, the amount representing the money allegedly derived from the offense charged in the indictment.

In connection with the arrests of the four men, law enforcement officers executed nine federal search and seizure warrants at five businesses, four residences, two safe deposit boxes and a storage shed in Albuquerque. Federal search and seizure warrants also were executed at another ten businesses in Albuquerque. State authorities executed state search and seizure warrants at three businesses in Los Lunas and Rio Rancho.

The enforcement action in New Mexico also included execution of federal search and seizure warrants at ten businesses in Las Cruces; three businesses in Alamogordo; three businesses in Roswell; and one business in Sunland Park. A chart identifying the businesses at which federal warrants were executed is attached.

According to the DEA, over the past several years, there has been a growing use of, and interest in, synthetic cathinones (stimulants/hallucinogens) sold under the guise of “bath salts” or “plant food.” Marketed under names such as “Ivory Wave,” “Purple Wave,” “Vanilla Sky,” or “Bliss,” these products are comprised of a class of dangerous substances perceived to mimic cocaine, LSD, MDMA, and/or methamphetamine. Users have reported impaired perception, reduced motor control, disorientation, extreme paranoia, and violent episodes. The long-term physical and psychological effects of use are unknown but potentially severe.

These products have become increasingly popular, particularly among teens and young adults and those who mistakenly believe they can bypass the drug testing protocols that have been set up by employers and government agencies to protect public safety. They are sold at a variety of retail outlets, in head shops, and over the Internet. However, they have not been approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for human consumption or for medical use, and there is no oversight of the manufacturing process.

Smoke-able herbal blends marketed as being “legal” and providing a marijuana-like high have also become increasingly popular, particularly among teens and young adults, because they are easily available and, in many cases, they are more potent and dangerous than marijuana. These products consist of plant material that has been coated with dangerous psychoactive compounds that mimic THC, the active ingredient in marijuana. Just as with the synthetic cathinones, synthetic cannabinoids are sold at a variety of retail outlets, in head shops and over the Internet. These substances, however, have not been approved by the FDA for human consumption, and there is no oversight of the manufacturing process. Brands such as “Spice,” “K2,” “Blaze,” and “Red X Dawn” are labeled as incense to mask their intended purpose.

In announcing New Mexico's role in yesterday's nationwide takedown, U.S. Attorney Gonzales said, "Dangerous, highly addictive and illegal drugs in any form and by any name are still dangerous, highly addictive and illegal. It is imperative that everyone, especially unwary young people, realize that this stuff is not for sport, and we will prosecute those who know the dangers but push it for profit behind a facade of a legitimate business. I thank DEA and its federal and local partners here in New Mexico for working very hard to eradicate these drugs from our community."

"DEA remains committed to raising public awareness about the dangers of synthetic drugs and to removing these harmful substances off the streets. Those who engage in the sale of these drugs should be put on notice that DEA and our law enforcement partners will hold them accountable for their actions. Dealers will be investigated and arrested, and their illicit assets will be seized," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Arabit.

DEA's Special Operations Division coordinated this nationwide series of cases, along with DEA's Office of Diversion Control, Homeland Security Investigations, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, Customs and Border Protection, Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigations, Food and Drug Administration, and countless state and local law enforcement members.

The enforcement operation in Albuquerque was led by the Albuquerque District Office of the DEA with assistance from the Albuquerque Police Department, the New Mexico State Police, the Bernalillo County Sheriff's Office, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Los Lunas Police Department. Assistant U.S. Attorney Reeve W. Swainston is prosecuting the case against the defendants named in the Rihani indictment and supported the Albuquerque operation.

The enforcement operation in Las Cruces, Alamogordo, Roswell and Sunland Park was led by the Las Cruces office of the DEA with assistance from the Las Cruces/Doña Ana County Metro Narcotics Agency, the Las Cruces Police Department Gang Task Force, Doña Ana County Sheriff's Office, the New Mexico State Police, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Homeland Security Investigations, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms, the Roswell Police Department, the Alamogordo Department of Public Safety, the Sunland Park Police Department, the Hatch Police Department, the New Mexico State University Police Department, the New Mexico Motor Transportation Police, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the 3rd Judicial District Attorney's Office (Doña Ana County), the 12th Judicial District Attorney's Office (Otero County). Assistant U.S. Attorneys Jessica Cardenas Jarvis, Sarah M. Davenport, Renee L. Camacho, and Terri Abernathy from the U.S. Attorney's office in Las Cruces also supported the operation in southern New Mexico.

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