



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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District of Arizona*

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THREE MEXICAN NATIONALS SENTENCED FOR A SMUGGLING TRANSPORTATION CONSPIRACY RESULTING IN A ROLL-OVER

PHOENIX – Gregorio Villegas-Rivas, 48, of Sinaloa, Mexico was sentenced today by U.S. District Judge G. Murray Snow to 37 months in federal prison. Carlos Velasquez-Cuevas, 25, of Jalisco, Mexico, and Gustavo Ortega-Rivas, 24, of Sinaloa, Mexico, were also sentenced today by Judge Snow to 30 months each. All three pleaded guilty on November 26, 2008 to Conspiracy to Transport Illegal Aliens for their role in a smuggling operation which ended in a roll-over crash in which several people were injured.

The case arose from a high-speed pursuit in October 2008 in Phoenix on Interstate 17. Arizona Department of Public Safety (DPS) officers initially observed a white van driving in an erratic fashion. Officers began pursuit of the vehicle believing it contained illegal aliens or drugs. As the van proceeded on I-17, it moved onto the Interstate 10 west-bound ramp nearly colliding with vehicles in its path. Once on I-10, the van continued at speeds greater than 80-miles per hour, eventually exiting onto city streets. On a city street, the van ran a red light and continued at approximately 65 miles per hour until it came to a stop at a dead-end. DPS marked units converged, but the driver suddenly turned and drove towards the officers.

In the interest of public safety, DPS discontinued the pursuit. Ten minutes later, DPS officers received a report that the van collided with civilian vehicles and rolled-over near the intersection of 27th Avenue and Southern in Phoenix. Twenty-three illegal aliens fled the van but were quickly located by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents with the assistance of DPS officers. Four illegal aliens were injured as a result of the crash. Villegas-Rivas was identified as the driver of the van and Velasquez-Cuevas and Ortega-Rivas as smugglers and co-conspirators in the transporting of the aliens.

The investigation in this case was conducted by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and the Arizona Department of Public Safety. The prosecution was handled by Josh Patrick Parecki and Cassie Woo, Assistant U.S. Attorneys, District of Arizona, Phoenix.

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