



Department of Justice

Acting United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown
Eastern District of California

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CARUTHERS METH DISTRIBUTOR CONVICTED

FRESNO, Calif.—Acting United States Attorney Lawrence G. Brown, announced that today a federal jury returned guilty verdicts against JOSE ESQUIVEL MENDEZ, aka ALBERTO PEREZ-LOPEZ, 25, an illegal alien from Tijuana, Mexico, following a four-day trial for conspiring to distribute and to possess with intent to distribute crystal methamphetamine, possessing crystal methamphetamine, and avoiding examination by immigration officers.

This case is the product of an investigation conducted by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

According to Assistant United States Attorney Karen A. Escobar, who is prosecuting the case, ESQUIVEL MENDEZ and co-defendants RIGOBERTO AGUILAR LOPEZ, 37, of Caruthers, Calif., and MIGUEL ANGEL NUNEZ-BARRAGAN, 34, of San Diego, were arrested on February 13, 2007, at AGUILAR LOPEZ's residence for attempting to sell 5.5 pounds of high-purity crystal methamphetamine with a street value of \$900,000 to a confidential source after negotiating with the confidential source for the delivery and sale of the drug. AGUILAR LOPEZ obtained the methamphetamine through his cousin, NUNEZ-BARRAGAN, 34, who in turn obtained the drug from ESQUIVEL MENDEZ and his sources of supply.

The evidence indicated that the methamphetamine had been smuggled into the United States from Mexico after protracted negotiations during which AGUILAR LOPEZ acknowledged increased security at the U.S./Mexico border. According to the DEA, methamphetamine prices began soaring in 2007 as a result of heightened border security at the U.S./Mexico border. Mexico is the primary source of methamphetamine in U.S. markets. Crystal methamphetamine is a highly addictive, more potent form of methamphetamine.

ESQUIVEL MENDEZ is scheduled for sentencing on August 7, 2009, before U.S. District Judge Lawrence J. O'Neill, who heard the trial. He faces a mandatory minimum prison sentence of 10 years and a maximum term of life in prison, along with a fine of up to \$4 million.

NUNEZ-BARRAGAN previously entered a guilty plea to the drug conspiracy and is currently scheduled for sentencing on June 29, 2009. AGUILAR LOPEZ was sentenced on October 20, 2008, to 14 years following his guilty plea to the drug conspiracy.

ESQUIVEL MENDEZ, NUNEZ-BARRAGAN, and AGUILAR LOPEZ are each subject to deportation after they serve their prison sentences.

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