



U.S. Department of Justice
Michael W. Cotter

United States Attorney
District of Montana

NEWS ADVISORY

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Contact:
Victoria L. Francis
Assistant U.S. Attorney
District of Montana
(406) 247- 4633

**THE U.S. ATTORNEY FOR THE DISTRICT OF MONTANA ANNOUNCES
THE EXECUTION OF 26 CRIMINAL SEARCH WARRANTS
AND 4 CIVIL SEIZURE WARRANTS IN MONTANA.**

The United States Attorney for the District of Montana, Michael W. Cotter, announced today the culmination of a 18-month multi-agency investigation into the drug trafficking activities of criminal enterprises operating throughout the State of Montana. In furtherance of that investigation, a total of 26 criminal search warrants were executed on March 14, 2011, at premises in the following communities: Belgrade, Big Sky, Billings, Bozeman, Columbia Falls, Dillon, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, Miles City, Missoula, Olney and Whitefish. Items seized by law enforcement may be disclosed after search warrant returns are filed with the United States District Court.

In addition, Civil Seizure Warrants for financial institutions in Bozeman, Helena, and Kalispell seeking up to \$4,000,000 were executed.

Search warrants and civil seizure warrants were issued based on judicial findings that probable cause exists to believe that the premises located in thirteen Montana towns are involved in criminal enterprises that have violated the Controlled Substances Act (CSA) related to marijuana, a Schedule I controlled substance. Specifically, it is alleged in the search warrants, civil seizure warrants and related documents that the premises or property identified were involved in some or all of the following violations of federal law: manufacture of marijuana and possession with intent to distribute marijuana, and distribution of marijuana in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 841, conspiracy to commit the offenses of manufacture of marijuana, possession with intent to distribute marijuana and distribution of marijuana in violation of 21 U.S.C. § 846, structuring or assisting in structuring any transaction to evade currency reporting requirements or causing or attempting to cause a domestic financial institution to fail to file Currency Transaction Reports in violation of 31 U.S.C. §§ 5324(a)(1) and (3).

Congress placed marijuana in Schedule I of the CSA. Under federal law, growing, distributing and possessing marijuana (other than in a federally authorized research program) is a violation of the CSA. A substance listed under Schedule I has: (a) a high potential for abuse, (b) no currently accepted medical use in treatment in the United States, and (c) a lack of accepted safety for use of the drug or other substance under medical supervision. Because of the danger posed by Schedule I substances, the Department of Justice continues to focus its enforcement and investigative efforts in targeting large-scale drug organizations that cultivate, manufacture, distribute, or sell marijuana.

United States Attorney Cotter said that "Twenty-six search warrants were carried out yesterday where there is probable cause that the premises were involved in illegal and large-scale trafficking of marijuana. When criminal networks violate federal laws those involved will be prosecuted."

Individuals with illnesses who are in clear and unambiguous compliance with state law are not the focus of this investigation.

The following federal, state and local law enforcement agencies participated in the execution of the search warrants and the seizure of the civil assets at multiple locations across the state of Montana: the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations, the Internal Revenue Service, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Environmental Protection Agency-Criminal Investigation Division, U.S. Customs and Border Protection-Border Patrol, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. These federal agencies were assisted by the Montana Division of Criminal Investigations, and local High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area task forces, the Northwest Drug Task Force, the Kalispell Police Department, the Flathead County Sheriff's Office,

the Missoula Police Department, the Missoula County Sheriff's Office, the Missoula High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force, the Great Falls Police Department, the Cascade County Sheriff's Office, the Central Montana Drug Task Force, the Billings Police Department, the Yellowstone County Sheriff's Office, the Eastern Montana High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force, the Dillon Police Department, the Beaverhead County Sheriff's Office, the Park County Sheriff's Office, the Bozeman Police Department, the Gallatin County Sheriff's Office, the Missouri River Drug Task Force, the Helena Police Department, the Lewis & Clark Sheriff's Office, and the Eastern Montana Drug Task Force - Miles City.

The information contained in the search warrants, civil seizure warrants and related documents are based on the information discovered during the course of ongoing investigations. To date, no federal criminal charges, indictments, informations or complaints have been filed against any of the named individuals identified in the search warrants, civil seizure warrants and related documents. All named individuals and locations identified in the search warrants, civil seizure warrants and related documents are presumed innocent until proven guilty.