

SUCCESSFUL DRUG INTERDICTION CASE EXAMPLES

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SUCCESSFUL DRUG INTERDICTION CASE EXAMPLES: DPS

Operation Rio Grande asset forfeiture cases (Feb. 2019-August 2019). All ten are in connection with arrests for narcotics distribution. When looking for specific cases where civil forfeiture would apply with Rio Grande cases, we identified two primary examples.

- a. The first example would be in the event someone is arrested for distribution and currency is seized. The suspect is debriefed and admits the currency is proceeds of drug sales. The suspect cooperates with agents and is signed up as an informant who then “works off” their charges. No criminal charges would be filed but agents would seek civil forfeiture on the seized currency because it was proceeds of drug sales.
- b. The second example would be when agents arrest a drug dealer who is in the country illegally and the dealer is deported before the criminal case gets filed. In many cases ORG agents have seen these dealers moved to out of state immigration detention facilities within just a couple days of their arrest in Utah. These people are deported and often never return to face the criminal charges. Without the ability to use civil forfeiture, the seized currency would sit indefinitely.

Case Examples

1. \$4354.00, possession with intent to distribute- (Federal charges pending). Distribution of prescription pills and methamphetamine.
2. \$1195.00, possession with intent to distribute- (criminal and civil filed with SLCDA) Honduran dealer with an ounce of heroin.
3. \$1295.00, distribution of narcotics (criminal and civil filed with SLCDA) Honduran dealer with ½ ounce of heroin
4. \$536.00, distribution of narcotics (criminal and civil filed with the SLCDA) Two Honduran dealers with 1.5 ounces of heroin.
5. \$1124.00, distribution of heroin, (criminal and civil filed with the SLCDA) One Honduran dealer with 1 pound of heroin.
6. \$23,954, search warrant, 1.5 lbs of methamphetamine, one ounce of heroin, ½ lb of cocaine. Additional pounds of heroin and methamphetamine seized as case progressed.
7. \$4703.00, search warrant, distribution of narcotics (criminal and civil filed with the SLCDA). Agents seized 3 ounces of crack cocaine during the search warrant along with the currency.
8. \$12,200.00, search warrant, distribution of narcotics (criminal and civil filed with the SLCDA). Search warrant on residence. Currency, 1 pound of methamphetamine, and a stolen handgun were seized.
9. \$2360.00, search warrant, distribution of heroin (Federal charges filed) Search warrant, dealer in the country illegally. 2.2 pounds of heroin seized. Subject was indicted federally and is currently in custody.
10. \$1217.00, possession/distribution of methamphetamine and heroin (state criminal and civil charges filed with the SLCDA). Federal charges are pending due to a link with another agency’s case. 7.5 pounds of methamphetamine and ½ pound of heroin were seized by ORG agents during the investigation.

SUCCESSFUL DRUG INTERDICTION CASE EXAMPLES: DPS

DPS Highway Interdiction Cases demonstrating the need for civil forfeiture

1. Vehicle stopped in Spring 2019 for traffic violation. Discrepancy in travel plans and other indicators of criminal behavior. Positive K9 indication for narcotics. Suspect alluded that he worked at a restaurant as a server and took some time off of work. Discovery of a large amount of currency behind the suitcase liner and the suitcase was in the trunk. A controlled hide also resulted in a positive indication of narcotics. It was discovered the suspect was not employed since January. Suspect declined to be interviewed. A warrant was obtained to search the devices. The phone was inaccessible due to password protections. Additional evidence obtained that refuted his travel plan claims. Additional evidence showed the suspect had traveled 13K miles in three month period in 2019. The case was submitted criminally however the prosecutor's office requested additional follow up (2 facebook search warrants requested in the summer) so they filed it civilly, thus stopping the clock and allowing us to continue the investigation into criminal charges. Warrants were executed on social media sites to show a pattern of criminal activity.
2. Vehicle stopped for a traffic violation. Discrepancy in travel plans and other indicators of criminal behavior resulted in application of a search warrant for the vehicle. Additionally there was a positive K9 indication for narcotics. The suspect initially stated he was not employed but then stated he delivered products. Vacuum sealed bags with a significant amount of currency were discovered under the back seat storage unit. Additionally, marijuana shake was discovered in the vehicle. A controlled hide was conducted and the K9 indicated positive on the money. During the interview suspect admitted the money did not belong to him and disclaimed ownership. He made incriminating admissions, but identified another person as vehicle owner of the vehicle. The owner was contacted and also disclaimed ownership of the money. In this case, civil asset forfeiture is the primary course to follow as, there is no ownership of money and money laundering charges (a specific offense committed in Utah is difficult to prosecute according to prosecutors) is not possible to pursue without pursuing a criminal case in Utah.

SUCCESSFUL DRUG INTERDICTION CASE EXAMPLES: SALT LAKE COUNTY

1. In August of 2018, the DEA Salt Lake City District Office (SLCDO), HIDTA Task Force Group 3, Unified Police Department (UPD) Metro Gang Unit, ATF Salt Lake City, and IRS Salt Lake City began a T-III investigation targeting a Utah-based gang.

- a. November 16, 2018, while acting on information received from active T-III intercepts of a gang member's phone, 22 pounds of methamphetamine and one pound of heroin were seized from a subject in a rental car traveling from Tijuana, Mexico to Salt Lake City, Utah.
- b. November 2018, T-III intercepts led to the seizure of approximately \$19,000 US Currency during a traffic stop of two gang couriers as part of a drugs and firearm transaction.
- c. The targets of this investigation were committing armed robberies, aggressive assaults, sexual assaults, extortion, money laundering, bulk-cash smuggling, international wire transfers of drug proceeds, identity fraud, mail fraud, credit card fraud, firearms trafficking, the organized diversion of prescription OxyContin pills, and selling THC-loaded vape cartridges
- d. February 15, 2019, the District Office executed an operational takedown of approximately thirty-four gang members and their known associates in the Greater Salt Lake area, executing six federal search warrants and arrest warrants in a joint operation conducted by DEA, ATF, UPD Metro Gang Task Force, IRS, US Marshals, and multiple other state and local partner agencies. Federal arrest warrants for drug conspiracy, money laundering, and firearm violations were served and an additional 6 subjects were indicted following the takedown operation.
- e. Currently, agents are aggressively pursuing charges against upper-level Mexican cartel targets outside of Utah. Agents and detectives seized: 19 firearms (1 AK-47), approximately 30 pounds of methamphetamine, 2.2 pounds of heroin, various amounts of oxycodone, MDMA, cocaine, marijuana, hallucinogens, THC-loaded vape cartridges and over \$23,000 in bulk US Currency.

2. In December of 2018, UPD Detectives and DEA Metro Narcotics began investigating a Drug Trafficking Operation (DTO) operating in the Salt Lake Valley.

- a. In March 2019, a federal search warrant for a duplex, located in a residential area, and related to the organization was secured. During the search, probable cause was established to secure a search warrant for the adjoining duplex. As a result of both search warrants, two arrests were made, and one firearm, 2 kilo presses, 2.5 kilograms

SUCCESSFUL DRUG INTERDICTION CASE EXAMPLES: SALT LAKE COUNTY

of cocaine, 800 grams of heroin, 100 grams of crack cocaine and over \$304,000 US Currency were located and seized.

3. The Salt Lake Metro Gang Unit had three major cases during 2018 focused on gangs, firearms, and narcotics distribution. The unit partnered with several federal agencies to accomplish these cases including the FBI Safe Streets Task Force, the ATF, the DEA, and the United States Attorneys Office

- a. Two of the cases were federal Title-III investigations.
- b. Among all three cases, 107 federal indictments were obtained on known gang members for weapons and/or drug related offenses.
- c. Over 62 pounds of methamphetamine, 2 pounds of heroin, more than 17 pounds of marijuana, and 60 firearms were seized.
- d. Throughout 2018, the Salt Lake Metro Gang Unit had a total of 158 federal indictments (some being multi-defendant indictments), seized 189 firearms, and made over 360 gang member felony arrests.

SUCCESSFUL DRUG INTERDICTION CASE EXAMPLES: UTAH COUNTY

1. Utah County Major Crimes Task Force statistics for the last 12 months:

- a. Drug seizures: 88.1 pounds of heroin, 269.55 pounds of methamphetamine, 399.09 pounds of marijuana
- b. Firearm seizures: 76
- c. Cash-Assets seizures: \$608,206
- d. Federal Indictments: 21
- e. Felony arrests: 194
- f. Misdemeanor arrests: 163
- g. Drug trafficking Operations Disrupted: 8

2. Detectives from the Utah County Major Crimes Task Force have collaborated with agencies throughout Utah and outside Utah, including state, local and federal agencies in southern and central California, Nevada and Arizona.

- a. Since January 2019, they have disrupted 3 Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) seizing 30.5 pounds of heroin, 44 pounds of methamphetamine, 1 pound of cocaine, and 3 firearms
- b. Due to the detectives information sharing, a central California narcotics task force was able to seize an additional 22 pounds of heroin and 88 pounds of methamphetamine from a stash house in their jurisdiction.

3. Two Sergeants from the Utah County Major Crimes Task Force have been part of a multi-state heroin distribution organization that began in 2018.

- a. The agents built their case, in part through a wiretap investigation
- b. Cells or smaller DTOs were discovered and disrupted across six different western states.
- c. In the fall of 2018, over 50 pounds of heroin, 2 pounds of cocaine, and 500 fentanyl pills were seized along with the arrest of the high value leaders in the DTO in Utah County. The investigation is still ongoing at the federal level.

4. A detective from a local Utah County police department and part of the Utah County Major Task Force, has been integral to disrupting multiple DTOs for the past 5 years:

- a. In March 2018, the detective was part of a wiretap investigation where large quantities of meth were being trafficked from Phoenix to Salt Lake City. Not only were confessions secured, but several guns and more than 75 pounds of methamphetamine were seized.

SUCCESSFUL DRUG INTERDICTION CASE EXAMPLES: UTAH COUNTY

- b. In April 2018, the detective was the case officer on a heroin trafficking case: 6 search warrants were served, eight individuals were arrested, and 7 pounds of heroin were seized.
- c. In all of 2018, the detective assisted with two wiretaps, seized six guns, 88.5 pounds of meth, 19 pounds of heroin, \$60,000 in cash, and generated 108 cases with 51 individuals arrested.
- d. Since 2014 the detective has been directly involved in the seizure of 113.6 pounds of methamphetamine, 47.5 pounds of heroin, and 2.5 pounds of cocaine, a total street value of \$7,427,440.

SUCCESSFUL DRUG INTERDICTION CASE EXAMPLES: DAVIS COUNTY

1. Beginning in November of 2017, an agent from the Davis Metro Narcotics Strike Task Force took the lead investigating a drug trafficking organization importing and distributing large amounts of methamphetamine, heroin, cocaine, and fentanyl from St. George, Utah, through the Wasatch Front, and up into Boise, Idaho. The investigation also included DEA agents.

- a. The year-long investigation included controlled purchases with several different informants, a detailed investigation into the group's finances, physical surveillance, electronic covert surveillance, interviews with several associates, and open source investigations. During the investigation, agents encountered a DTO that employed advanced counter surveillance techniques and had four different stash locations that rotated consistently.
- b. In September 2018, federal affidavits for cell phone pings, trackers, and ultimately search warrants for multiple residences were authorized. During the wire intercept case, agents confirmed the DTO was purchasing \$300,000 to \$600,000 in illegal narcotics from cartel sources in Phoenix and California every 2-3 weeks. Agents also learned the DTO was purchasing fentanyl and mixing it into their heroin back in Utah.
- c. In October of 2018, Davis Metro and DEA agents, with assistance from the DEA HEAT, executed several federal search and arrest warrants. In total, 7 individuals were federally indicted and agents seized 9.8 pounds of fentanyl, 25 pounds of heroin, 50.5 pounds of methamphetamine, 6 firearms, and \$520,000 in US Currency.

SUCCESSFUL DRUG INTERDICTION CASE EXAMPLES: WEBER + MORGAN COUNTIES

- 1. The Weber/ Morgan Narcotics Task Force seized 117.57 pounds of methamphetamine in the 2018/ 2019 Fiscal year**
- 2. Agents of the Weber/ Morgan Narcotics Task Force, as part of Project Safe Neighborhoods, located and charged numerous individuals with distributing narcotics and weapons possession.**
 - a. Several career criminals have been federally indicted and removed from the streets of Weber County.
 - b. Agents have also worked hand in hand with officers from Ogden City compiling the Federal packets and testifying at Grand Jury.
 - c. Agents have done presentations for and outreach with neighborhood watch groups, schools, and church organizations.

SUCCESSFUL DRUG INTERDICTION CASE EXAMPLES: SEVIER COUNTY

- 1. Sevier County Major Crimes Unit coordinated with patrol officers from multiple agencies along with other local and federal partners, devised and executed a plan that majorly disrupted an organized local drug trade**
 - a. On July of 2018, .75 pounds of methamphetamine and several firearms were seized from one residence.
 - b. Multiple individuals were indicted on felony charges