

Operation Crystal Shield

Written by Staff Reports

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Methamphetamine seized before reaching New Mexico

WASHINGTON –Attorney General William P. Barr and Drug Enforcement Administration Acting Administrator Timothy J. Shea announced the results of Operation Crystal Shield, DEA’s six-month-long effort targeting the command and control elements of Mexican cartels that operate major methamphetamine “transportation hubs” in the United States.

At a press conference Sept. 10 in Phoenix, Ariz., Barr and Shea announced that in just six months, Operation Crystal Shield generated a total of more than 750 investigations, resulting in nearly 1,840 arrests and the seizure of more than 28,560 pounds of methamphetamine, \$43.3 million in drug proceeds, and 284 firearms.

In the DEA El Paso Division alone, which covers New Mexico and West Texas, the DEA conducted 101 investigations, made 176 arrests, and seized 919 pounds of methamphetamine, more than \$1.1 million dollars in drug proceeds, along with 19 firearms.

“In the months leading up to the launch of Operation Crystal Shield, communities across the United States experienced a surge of methamphetamine,” Shea said. “The COVID pandemic locked down many communities and impacted legitimate businesses, but the drug trade continued.

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“Under difficult conditions, DEA – along with our federal, state, and local partners – never stopped working as we helped stem the flow of methamphetamine onto our streets, even as violent drug traffickers sought new ways to smuggle it into the United States,” he continued.

The DEA launched Operation Crystal Shield Feb. 20, after identifying nine major methamphetamine trafficking hubs: Atlanta, Dallas, El Paso, Houston, Los Angeles, New Orleans, Phoenix, San Diego and St. Louis. Together these nine cities accounted for more than 75 percent of methamphetamine seized by DEA in 2019. Under this operation, DEA directed enforcement resources to these cities where methamphetamine is often trafficked in bulk and then distributed across the country.

Operation Crystal Shield leveraged existing DEA initiatives that target major drug trafficking networks, including the Mexican cartels that are responsible for the overwhelming majority of methamphetamine trafficked into and within the United States.

From Fiscal Year 2017 to FY 2019, DEA domestic seizures of methamphetamine increased 127 percent from approximately 49,500 pounds to about 112, 000 pounds. During the same timeframe, the number of DEA arrests related to methamphetamine increased by nearly 20 percent.