Written by Staff Reports
Friday, 09 September 2016 01:52



Defendant is one of 34 charged

ALBUQUERQUE – Robert Alan Rutledge, 34, of Alamogordo, pleaded guilty Sept. 6 in federal court in Las Cruces, to methamphetamine trafficking crime charges. Under the terms of his plea agreement, Rutledge will be sentenced to 48 months in prison followed, by a term of supervised release to be determined by the court.

Rutledge was one of 34 individuals charged in December 2015 with federal and tribal drug offenses as the result of an 18-month multi-agency investigation led by the DEA and BIA into methamphetamine trafficking on the Mescalero Apache Reservation.

Eighteen defendants, including five members of the Mescalero Apache Tribe and 13 non-Natives were charged in six federal indictments and a federal criminal complaint. Sixteen other members of the Mescalero Apache Tribe were charged in tribal criminal complaints approved by the Mescalero Apache Tribal Court.

The investigation leading to the federal and tribal charges was initiated in May 2014 in response to an increase in violent crime on the Mescalero Apache Reservation perpetrated by methamphetamine users.

The investigation initially targeted a drug trafficking organization that was allegedly distributing methamphetamine within the Reservation, and later expanded to include two other drug trafficking organizations in southeastern New Mexico that allegedly served as sources of supply for the methamphetamine distributed within the Reservation.

In Aug. 2014, the investigation was designated as part of the Justice Department's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force program, which combines the resources and unique expertise of federal agencies, along with their local counterparts, in a coordinated effort to disrupt and dismantle major drug trafficking organizations.

The investigation is one of the first OCDETF investigations to utilize electronic surveillance (wiretaps) in Indian Country. More than 10 kilograms of methamphetamine were seized during the course of the investigation.

Rutledge was arrested on an indictment charging him and seven co-conspirators with conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine in Otero County between April 9, 2015 and Oct. 16, 2015, and other drug trafficking offenses.

During the Sept. 6 proceedings, Rutledge entered a guilty plea to participating in a methamphetamine trafficking conspiracy and possessing methamphetamine with intent to distribute. In his plea agreement, Rutledge admitted that in Aug. and Sept. 2015, he obtained more than 50 grams but less than 200 grams of methamphetamine from a co-defendant, which he sold to other individuals.

Rutledge further admitted that on Aug. 29, 2015, he sold 18 grams of methamphetamine to another individual.

A sentencing hearing has yet to be scheduled.

Rutledge is the 13th of the 18 federal defendants to enter a guilty plea. The remaining five federal defendants have entered not guilty pleas to the charges against them. Charges in indictments are merely accusations and defendants are presumed innocent unless found guilty in a court of law.

The federal and tribal cases were investigated by the Las Cruces office of the DEA, District IV of

the BIA's Office of Justice Services (Mescalero Agency), BIA's Division of Drug Enforcement, Mescalero Tribal Police Department, Hatch Police Department, FBI and Lea County Drug Task Force.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Terri J. Abernathy of the U.S. Attorney's Las Cruces Branch Office is prosecuting the federal cases, and Mescalero Tribal Prosecutor Melissa Chavez is prosecuting the tribal cases.