

Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor for the City of New York

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Truck with 100 lbs of heroin seized: Drugs worth at least \$14 million

Heroin concealed in axle casings and drive shaft

Bridget G. Brennan, New York City's Special Narcotics Prosecutor, James J. Hunt, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's New York Division (DEA), New York City Police Commissioner William J. Bratton and Joseph A. D'Amico, Superintendent of the New York State Police, announced the arrest of two men charged with transporting approximately 100 pounds of heroin hidden within vehicle parts within New York City.

Yesterday evening, a team from the DEA's New York Drug Enforcement Task Force – comprised of DEA special agents, New York City Police Department detectives and New York State Police investigators – conducted surveillance in the vicinity of Northern Boulevard and 84th Street, Elmhurst, NY, as part of an ongoing investigation into heroin distribution organizations operating in the Northeast region of the United States. At approximately 8:00 p.m., agents and officers observed a blue pick-up truck and a silver pick-up truck towing a hitch trailer and driving in tandem. Both vehicles had North Carolina license plates and were driving slowly. One vehicle was unregistered and both circled blocks several times. At 8:45 p.m., agents and officers approached the vehicles and identified themselves.

A trained search dog alerted to the presence of controlled substances in one of the pick-up trucks and the two drivers, PETER OMAR GARCIA-ROMERO and JOSE GUADENCIO LANTAN-VELA were taken into custody. Both are natives of Guatemala; GARCIA-ROMERO resided in North Carolina; LANTAN-VELA entered the U.S. on a travel visa on January 15.

The vehicles were taken to DEA's Manhattan headquarters where a New York State Search Warrant was executed on both vehicles. Heroin was found concealed within a car axle casing that was in the bed of the silver pick-up truck. The axle was disassembled in three parts; and the heroin was found in the axle and the drive shaft casings. The heroin was pressed into round shapes to fit in the axle casing and packaged in square shapes to fit in the drive shaft. New York City Police Department's Emergency Services Unit assisted with the search of the sophisticated concealed compartments and retrieval.

The DEA estimated that the black market value of the drugs is at least \$14 million dollars.

Special Narcotics Prosecutor Bridget G. Brennan thanked her office's Special Investigations Bureau, the DEA's New York Drug Enforcement Task Force, the NYPD Emergency Service Unit and the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey for their assistance.

The Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor is prosecuting LANTAN-VELA and GARCIA-ROMERO. Both defendants will be charged with one count each of Conspiracy in the Second Degree, Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance in the First Degree, and Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance in the Third Degree. LANTAN-VELA and GARCIA-ROMERO are expected to be arraigned in Manhattan Criminal Court, 100 Centre St., late this evening.

The charges and allegations are merely accusations and the defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty.