

Guatemalan national charged in \$1.25 million Fentanyl conspiracy

A Guatemalan national was charged yesterday in federal court in Boston in connection with a conspiracy to distribute over five kilograms of fentanyl, worth approximately \$1.25 million.

Rene Alejandro Salazar Reyes, 26, was charged by complaint with one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute and to distribute fentanyl. Salazar was arrested on Saturday, Jan. 20, 2018, and will remain in custody pending a detention and probable cause hearing on Jan. 25, 2018, in federal court in Boston.

“Fentanyl is devastating communities across Massachusetts,” said United States Attorney Andrew E. Lelling. “Just a few milligrams of fentanyl can cause a fatal overdose. Saturday’s seizure of over five kilograms is an important step in our efforts to keep this deadly drug off our streets. This investigation is a testament to our commitment to work with our law enforcement partners to aggressively pursue individuals who seek to distribute deadly narcotics, without any regard for human life, throughout our neighborhoods and communities.”

“Opioid abuse is at epidemic levels in Massachusetts and across the Northeast,” said DEA Special Agent in Charge Michael J. Ferguson. “Fentanyl is causing deaths in record numbers and DEA remains committed to aggressively pursuing Drug Trafficking Organizations or individuals who distribute this poison in order to profit and destroy people’s lives. This investigation demonstrates the strength of collaborative law enforcement efforts in Massachusetts and our strong partnership with the U.S. Attorney’s Office.”

According to court documents, in November 2017, a cooperating witness informed a federal law enforcement officer that a Guatemalan man was selling heroin and/or fentanyl in the Boston area. After a series of recorded cell phone texts and calls, the Guatemalan man agreed to sell the cooperating witness five kilograms of fentanyl, which he would arrange to be delivered to the cooperating witness in Massachusetts. The cooperating witness agreed to make a partial payment of \$70,000 for the drugs. The estimated street value of one kilogram of fentanyl is \$250,000; one gram sells for approximately \$40-\$50.

It is alleged that on Jan. 19, 2018, the Guatemalan man placed a call, which was also recorded, to the cooperating witness informing him that a courier would deliver the fentanyl to him in Massachusetts the next day. Soon after, the cooperating witness received a call from the Guatemalan man's courier, who law enforcement agents determined to be Salazar, the target of a previous criminal investigation in Maryland.

On Jan. 20, 2018, the cooperating witness called Salazar and asked him where he was and then drove to meet Salazar so that Salazar could then follow the cooperating witness to a location to conduct the transaction. While Salazar was on the phone with the cooperating witness, surveillance officers saw Salazar standing outside his vehicle. Once Salazar got into his car to follow the cooperating witness, agents followed Salazar and directed law enforcement officers to conduct a traffic stop.

According to court documents, when the officer stopped Salazar for failing to stop at a stop sign, Salazar appeared visibly nervous. The officer asked Salazar if he had any drugs or weapons in the car, to which Salazar replied that he did not. The officer then asked if he could search the car, to which Salazar replied, "Yes, go ahead." According to the complaint affidavit, the officer found a large plastic shopping bag on the rear passenger floorboard that contained 23 individually

heat sealed clear plastic bags containing approximately 5.2 kilograms of a white powdery substance. Salazar was then placed under arrest.

Salazar faces a sentence of no greater than 20 years in prison, three years and up to a lifetime of supervised release, a fine of \$1 million, and will be subject to deportation proceedings upon completion of his sentence. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based on the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

U.S. Attorney Lelling and DEA SAC Ferguson made the announcement. Assistance was provided by Homeland Security Investigations in Maryland and the Massachusetts State Police. Assistant U.S. Attorney Leah Foley of Lelling's Narcotics and Money Laundering Unit is prosecuting the case.

The details contained in the charging document are allegations. The defendant is presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.