

The Sun

**Drug seizure may be Md.'s biggest
More than a ton of cocaine found in Baltimore warehouse
3 men arrested in N.J.
Contraband hidden in cylinders shipped from South America**

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In what federal law enforcement officials are calling the largest drug seizure in Maryland history, police have confiscated more than a ton of cocaine, worth \$25 million, that had been shipped to a chemical company in Baltimore.

Police said they traced the drugs from South America to a seaport in Houston, to the Dundalk Marine Terminal and, finally, to Chemical Treatment Inc., a company based in a warehouse on Moravia Park Drive in East Baltimore.

Federal agents arrested three men Tuesday at the Vince Lombardi rest stop on the New Jersey Turnpike and charged them with importing the cocaine, which police said was to be distributed in dozens of East Coast cities.

At a news briefing in a shed at the Dundalk Marine Terminal yesterday, Acting U.S. Attorney Beth P. Gesner called it an "extraordinary seizure" and said the cooperation between the police agencies and the National Guard was "remarkable and certainly historic."

Officials from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the U.S. Customs Service, the FBI and Baltimore police declined to offer many details, saying the suspected drug organization is still being intensely investigated.

They displayed the seized cocaine with much fanfare, stacking on four wooden pallets 1,000 "bricks," weighing 2.2 pounds each, of cocaine that was 90 percent pure. Two DEA agents stood guard holding M-16 automatic assault rifles.

"This is the largest seizure of illegal drugs in the state of Maryland," said Charles O. Simonsen, the acting special agent in charge of the Customs Service in Baltimore.

The seizure is more than twice the size of one at the marine terminal in 1992, when customs agents found 1,007 pounds of cocaine hidden in 55-gallon drums of glycerin that had come from Panama.

The same year, authorities in Panama seized a 6-ton cocaine shipment, worth \$200 million, that was intended for transport to a phony tile business in Baltimore. It was believed at the time to be one of the five largest known drug shipments earmarked for the United States.

Authorities said the investigation into the recent case began in August with a tip from a resident about suspicious activity at the Moravia Park Drive warehouse. Police said the chemical company exported large cylinders filled with chlorine gas to South America and then brought the empty cylinders back to the United States.

In January, customs agents in Houston investigated a shipment of 13 metal cylinders destined for the Baltimore warehouse. They drilled a hole in one of the cylinders and said they found about 360 pounds of cocaine in a tin container inside.

Police said they resealed the cylinder and allowed the shipment to proceed to Baltimore. An undercover federal agent then got in touch with the suspects and, posing as a trucker willing to transport illegal loads, arranged to help ship the drugs.

The three suspects were arrested as they met with the undercover agent at the rest area on the New Jersey Turnpike. They were

identified as Jose H. Orozco-Alba, 30, of New York City's Queens borough; and Oscar Orlando Alba, 29, and Luis Francisco Alba, 49, both of Miami.

Police said all three were charged with conspiracy to import drugs, importation of drugs and conspiracy to distribute drugs. They are related, but police could not say how.

Baltimore police, assisted by agents from the FBI, the Customs Service, the DEA and the anti-drug unit of the Maryland National Guard, raided the Moravia Park Drive warehouse, where they reported finding the 2,200 pounds of cocaine.

Police said the drugs were hidden in tin boxes packed inside six of 20 large cylinders. One shipment came to Baltimore directly from South America, the other through Houston.

Authorities would not identify the South American country, but "Venezuela" was stamped on the sides of the cylinders. Investigators said the 14 empty cylinders were made with thicker metal so that all of the cylinders were the same weight.

Police said the chemical company has been shut down. They would not comment further on their investigation.

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Caption:
PHOTO

Caption: On display: A federal drug agent stands guard over pallets stacked with confiscated cocaine "bricks."

Credit: KIM HAIRSTON: SUN STAFF

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