

The Sun

**Documents reveal plan for smuggling
Authorities call bust largest drug seizure in Maryland history
Five-month investigation
Cocaine was to go through Baltimore, court records say**

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Police who seized a ton of cocaine from a Baltimore warehouse last week broke up an elaborate scheme to smuggle drugs from Houston to New York and uncovered connections to South and Central America, newly filed court documents say.

Two affidavits totaling 18 pages, filed in U.S. District Court, detail a five-month undercover investigation of suspected drug distributors and how they allegedly planned to get \$25 million worth of cocaine to New York through Baltimore.

Federal authorities announced the seizure at a news conference Friday in which they displayed the cocaine packaged in 1,000 "bricks," each weighing one kilogram, or 2.2 pounds. They described it as the largest drug seizure in Maryland history.

The court documents describe allegations of drug money laundered at a Baltimore County car dealership, the purchase of a \$3,600 blow torch to cut open shipping containers and the renting of a city warehouse that was supposed to hold chlorine gas but remained virtually empty for months.

In their investigation, Drug Enforcement Administration, FBI and customs agents set up hidden cameras at the warehouse, searched a suspect's trash, followed cars through six states and photographed visitors to businesses and private houses.

Three suspects -- all arrested last week at the Vince Lombardi rest area on the New Jersey Turnpike -- were named at the news conference.

In custody are Jose H. Orozco-Alba, 30, of Queens, N.Y.; Oscar Orlando Alba, 29; and Luis Francisco Alba, 49, both of Miami. They are charged with possession and conspiracy to import cocaine.

The three suspects were en route to Maryland yesterday. A court date has not been set. Three other suspects named in court papers have not been arrested.

Police also made allegations of money laundering. Court documents reveal that a suspect who has not been arrested bought a burgundy 1996 pickup truck from Jerry's Chevrolet on East Joppa Road, paying for it in cash in three payments on three successive days and showing a Colombian passport and a U.S. visa obtained in Venezuela.

Federal authorities said in the documents that buying cars in such a manner is typical of the way drug dealers launder money. John Sophocles, the dealership's general manager, said the sale was suspicious and was reported to authorities.

Federal prosecutors would not comment on the case yesterday. But at the news conference Friday, Assistant U.S. Attorney Beth P. Gesner called the confiscated drugs an "extraordinary seizure."

It was more than twice the size of one at the Dundalk Marine Terminal in 1992, when customs agents found 1,007 pounds of cocaine hidden in 55-gallon drums that had come from Panama.

The size of last week's seizure was unusual, federal officials say. "Baltimore is not considered a big port of entry like Miami, Puerto Rico or the Southwest boarder," said Charles Simonsen, the acting special agent in charge of the U.S. Customs Service office

in Baltimore.

Police said their investigation began in September with a tip from a confidential source in Baltimore about suspicious activity at Chemical Treatment Inc. in the 6600 block of Moravia Park Drive.

Federal investigators said they watched workers transport trash from the warehouse to a suspect's apartment on Stonewain Court in Towson, where it was dumped outside the complex. That paperwork, court documents say, showed the company planned to export cylinders filled with chlorine gas to Venezuela and have the empty containers returned.

On Jan. 14, court papers said a suspect bought a "Pakmaster 100" cutting torch for \$3,613 from a Caton Avenue store. Earlier, the warehouse owner requested that gas service be cut off to the warehouse, police said, because the suspects planned to use the blow torch to open the cylinders and feared causing an explosion.

The next day, Jan. 15, U.S. customs agents in Galveston, Texas, reported finding 13 cylinders that had arrived in Houston from Venezuela via San Juan, Puerto Rico. The agents said they drilled a hole in one of the containers and found cocaine. They resealed the container, and undercover agents said they followed the shipment by truck.

Meanwhile, agents installed hidden cameras at the Moravia Park Drive building. "Surveillance and trash reviews have not indicated any legitimate business-related activities at the warehouse," court documents say.

On Jan. 27, police said, the truck from Houston arrived. Agents said they watched as workers unloaded the cylinders with a forklift and stacked them on the floor of the nearly empty building.

Then, court documents say, agents watched as a man with a flashlight compared serial numbers on the cylinders with paperwork on a clipboard in the darkened room. Suspects left without opening the containers, and police followed them north on Interstate 95 but lost them in Cecil County. Police said they also followed a green van from the warehouse to Philadelphia but lost track of it. They said they followed the burgundy pickup truck to Queens, N.Y.

On Feb. 18, court records say, an informant tipped off investigators that a Colombian man was making plans to send several men from New York and New Jersey to the Baltimore warehouse "to pick up a thousand kilograms of drugs contained in large pipes."

On Feb. 26, an undercover federal agent posing as a trucker willing to transport illegal loads met with three suspects at the New Jersey rest area. "The purpose of the meeting was to get together and travel to Baltimore to get into the warehouse, pick up the cylinders and return north," the court documents say.

Federal agents arrested the suspects -- court documents say one of them had a copy of the manifest for the container shipment -- and then raided the warehouse and seized the cocaine.

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