Coast Guard, CBP, Homeland Security Task Force Partners Apprehend Stowaway Smuggler



From U.S. Coast Guard Southeast District, Feb. 9, 2026

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – Coast Guard Station San Juan and Sector San Juan Boarding Team members working with Homeland

Security Task Force – San Juan Region partner agencies apprehended a stowaway smuggler and seized 10 bales of cocaine in San Juan Harbor, Puerto Rico, Jan. 28, 2026.

The seized contraband weighed a combined total of 358kgs/789.25 pounds and is estimated to have a wholesale value of more than $5 million. The apprehended suspect faces federal prosecution on drug trafficking charges.

Sector San Juan Command Center watchstanders received a VHF Channel 16 marine radio communication from inbound Tug vessel Signet Thunder at approximately 5:48 a.m., Jan. 28, 2026, while the vessel was towing the barge San Juan-JaxBridge to the Old Army Terminal port facility in San Juan Harbor. The tug Signet Thunder reported that a crewmember from an assist tugboat had boarded the barge and sighted a stowaway onboard. The tugboat further relayed they would hold position and wait for assistance. Watchstanders directed Station San Juan to launch and alerted Customs and Border Protection's Caribbean Air and Marine Branch and Office of Field Operations, and Puerto Rico Police Joint Forces of Rapid Action marine units which also responded.

Watchstanders issued an Urgent Marine Information Broadcast to advise vessel traffic to be on the lookout for distress. Shortly thereafter, the Station San Juan boat crew sighted and recovered one person and 10 bales of suspected contraband from the water. Once pier side, Sector Boarding Team and Customs and Border Protection Office of Field Operations officers completed a boarding of the Signet Thunder and the barge and found no other stowaways or contraband onboard. The suspect and seized contraband were transferred to Homeland Security Task Force-San Juan law enforcement partners at Coast Guard Base San Juan, Puerto Rico.

"This case highlights a great response and interoperability between Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, and Puerto Rico Police responding units and the strong collaboration

within Homeland Security Task Force – San Juan partner agencies to secure the nation's Eastern Caribbean maritime borders from illicit drug trafficking," said Cmdr. Matthew Romano. Sector San Juan chief of response. "We commend the actions of the tugboat Signet Thunder which reflect positively on the maritime community and the important role they play in safeguarding our nation's navigable waterways. We are proud to stand the watch alongside our Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice and our local law enforcement partners as we continue to combat illicit trafficking throughout the waters of Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands."

The Coast Guard is part of a whole-of-government approach to protect our maritime approaches in the Eastern Caribbean and secure our nation's borders by interdicting drug smuggling activities at sea and dismantling Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO) and Transnational Criminal Organizations (TCO), including narco-trafficking and human smuggling operations.