

Coast Guard offloads \$4.5 million in seized cocaine, transfers custody of 2 smugglers to federal law enforcement in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico



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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Napier offloaded 182 kilograms of cocaine and transferred custody of two male smugglers to federal law enforcement authorities in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, Friday.

The British Royal Navy HMS Trent (P224), operating with a Coast Guard LEDET onboard, seized the contraband and apprehended two smugglers, Dominican Republic nationals, following the interdiction of a go-fast vessel in Caribbean Sea waters southwest coast of Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico, March 3, 2024.

The interdiction is a result of interagency efforts in support of the Coast Guard's Western Hemisphere Strategy and Operation Unified Resolve. The Drug Enforcement Administration is leading the investigation in this case.

"We appreciate the work and collaboration of our British Royal Navy partners in stopping drug smuggling vessels in the high seas," said Cmdr. Gerard Wenk, Coast Guard Sector San Juan chief of response. "The work we do together daily with our federal and local and regional partners helps protect and bring stability to the Caribbean region from this threat."

"Drug smuggling organizations pose the greatest threat to the safety and health of our citizens," said DEA's Caribbean Division Special Agent in Charge Denise Foster. "The dedication of all maritime surveillance assets is crucial to the success of the mission at hand, we will continue to work with our counterparts and allocate all our law enforcement resources to make a greater impact in vulnerable areas where criminal organizations dedicated to drug trafficking are causing greater damage."

The Coast Guard's efforts under Operation Unified Resolve contribute to the interagency results being achieved daily under Operation Caribbean Guard, which coordinates efforts between the Coast Guard, DHS, and Commonwealth and Territorial law enforcement partners, who are working diligently to deter, detect and disrupt illicit maritime trafficking to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Detecting and interdicting illegal drug traffickers on the

high seas involves significant interagency and international coordination. The Joint Interagency Task Force South in Key West, Florida conducts the detection and monitoring of aerial and maritime transit of illegal drugs. Once interdiction becomes imminent, the law enforcement phase of the operation begins, and control of the operation shifts to the U.S. Coast Guard throughout the interdiction and apprehension. Interdictions in the Caribbean Sea are performed by members of the U.S. Coast Guard under the authority and control of the Coast Guard's Seventh District, headquartered in Miami.