

Coast Guard Transfers 3 Smugglers, Over \$5.6M in Seized Cocaine to Federal Agents



Coast Guard Cutter Heriberto Hernandez crew members offload over 200 kilograms of cocaine, valued at over \$5.6 million, and transfer three suspected smugglers, one Venezuelan and two Dominicans to federal agents from the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force March 2, 2021 at Coast Guard Base San Juan. U.S. Coast Guard

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The Coast Guard Cutter Heriberto Hernandez transferred custody of three suspected smugglers and \$5.6 million in seized cocaine to federal agents at Coast

Guard Base on San Juan March 2, following the interdiction of a drug smuggling vessel in the Caribbean Sea off St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a March 3 release.

The suspected smugglers are three males, one Venezuelan and two Dominican Republic nationals, who now face criminal charges by Department of Justice prosecution partners in the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico.

The interdiction resulted from multi-agency efforts in support of U.S. Southern Command's enhanced counter-narcotics operations in the Western Hemisphere, the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) and High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) programs, and the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force (CCSF).

"This interdiction was the result of great teamwork from beginning to end with our interagency partners," said Lt. Peter Kelly, Coast Guard Cutter Richard Dixon commanding officer. "I am extremely proud of the execution of the Richard Dixon crew in what was not an easy mission, and we are pleased to have kept such a large amount of cocaine from reaching U.S. streets."

The bust occurred during the afternoon of Feb. 23, 2021, after the aircrew of a Customs and Border Protection Caribbean Air and Marine Branch maritime patrol aircraft detected a suspicious go-fast vessel in international waters southeast of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands.

The Coast Guard Cutter Richard Dixon diverted to interdict the go-fast vessel with the assistance of the cutter's small boat. Following the interdiction, the Cutter Richard Dixon's boarding team located and seized over 200 kilograms of cocaine.

The crew of the cutter Richard Dixon embarked the three men and seized contraband from the go-fast vessel, and later

transferred them aboard the Coast Guard Cutter Heriberto Hernandez for transport and offload in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where CCSF federal agents received custody. Cutters Richard Dixon and Heriberto Hernandez are 154-foot fast response cutters homeported in San Juan, Puerto Rico.