

Cutter Offloads \$220 Million in Interdicted Illicit Drugs in San Diego



Rear Adm. Brian Penoyer, the Eleventh Coast Guard District commander; speaks to the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Active (WMEC 618) during a drug offload in San Diego, Wednesday. The drugs, worth an estimated \$220 million, were seized in international waters of the Eastern Pacific Ocean during April and May. *COAST GUARD / Petty Officer 3rd Class Alex Gray*

SAN DIEGO – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Active (WMEC 618) offloaded approximately 11,500 pounds of seized cocaine in San Diego, May 19, the Coast Guard 11th District said in a release.

The drugs, worth an estimated \$220 million, were seized in the international waters of the Eastern Pacific Ocean during April and May. They represent four suspected drug smuggling vessel interdictions off the coasts of Mexico, Central, and South America by the following Coast Guard ships:

The Coast Guard Cutter Active (WMEC 618) crew was responsible for two interdictions seizing approximately 5,650 pounds of cocaine.

The Coast Guard Cutter Steadfast (WMEC 623) crew was responsible for one interdiction seizing approximately 2,250 pounds of cocaine.

The Coast Guard Cutter Tahoma (WMEC 908) crew was responsible for one interdiction seizing approximately 3,660 pounds of cocaine.

Speakers at the event included Cmdr. James M. O'Mara IV, Coast Guard Cutter Active commanding officer; Rear Adm. Brian Penoyer, Eleventh Coast Guard District commander; Brandon

Tucker, Customs and Border Protection Deputy Director of Air Operations for the San Diego Air and Marine Branch; and Randy Grossman, the acting U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of California.

"This is the end state result of teamwork across multiple inner agencies. This is what we train for; we are manned, trained, and equipped to come down here and do a mission," O'Mara said. "The competition of this mission is a testament to this crew's resolve and their persistence to get out there and get it done."

On April 1, U.S. Southern Command increased counter-narcotics operations in the Western Hemisphere to disrupt the flow of drugs. Numerous U.S. agencies from the Departments of Defense, Justice, and Homeland Security cooperated in the effort to combat transnational organized crime. The Coast Guard, Navy, Customs and Border Protection, FBI, Drug Enforcement Administration, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, along with allied and international partner agencies, play a role in counter-drug operations.

The fight against drug cartels in the Eastern Pacific Ocean and the Caribbean Sea requires unity of effort in all phases from detection, monitoring, and interdictions, to criminal prosecutions for these interdictions by United States Attorney's Offices from the Middle District of Florida, the Southern District of Florida and the Southern District of California. The law enforcement phase of counter-smuggling operations in the Eastern Pacific Ocean is conducted under the authority of the 11th Coast Guard District, headquartered in Alameda. The interdictions, including the actual boardings, are led and conducted by members of the U.S. Coast Guard.

"Seizing 11,500 pounds of cocaine is no small feat. Of the 11,500 pounds you see here, the Active seized 5,600 pounds. And that is quite an accomplishment when you consider that Active and the other ships of her class have been in service

for more than 50 years,” Penoyer said. “I would like to congratulate Cmdr. O’Mara and the crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Active for their hard work, dedication, and sacrifice.”

The Active is a 210-foot medium-endurance cutter, commissioned in 1966 and homeported in Port Angeles, Washington. The Steadfast is a 210-foot medium endurance cutter, commissioned in 1968 and homeported in Astoria, Oregon. The Tahoma is a 270-foot medium endurance cutter, commissioned in 1988 and homeported in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.