

Coast Guard, DEA, Caribbean Border Interagency Group Partners Apprehend 4 Smugglers, Seize \$3 Million in Cocaine

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Margaret Norvell (WPC-1105) offloaded 200 pounds of cocaine Jan. 30 evening and transferred custody of four suspected smugglers to U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration Special agents in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, the Coast Guard 7th District said in a Jan. 31 release.

Coast Guard and Caribbean Border Interagency Group (CBIG) law enforcement authorities seized the \$3 million dollar cocaine shipment and apprehended the suspected smugglers following the interdiction of a go-fast vessel Tuesday night in waters north of Arecibo, Puerto Rico.

This interdiction is the result of ongoing multi-agency law enforcement efforts in support of Operation Caribbean Guard, the Caribbean Border Interagency Group and the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force (CCSF).

The suspected smugglers are Dominican nationals who are facing likely federal prosecution by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Puerto Rico.

"Tonight's success was a total team effort," said Lt. Carl Luxhoj, Air Station Borinquen MH-65 helicopter pilot. "The combined air support from both the fixed-wing and rotary-wing aircrews made the surface intercept of the suspect vessel possible. The recovery of evidence would not have been possible without the support of the Puerto Rico Police

Department [FURA]. The outstanding coordination from all involved prevented illegal migrants and contraband from reaching American soil.”

While on a routine patrol, the crew of a HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft from Air Station Miami detected a suspicious go-fast vessel late Jan. 29 night transiting with four people onboard, approximately 20 nautical miles north of Isabela, Puerto Rico. The go-fast was transiting southeast without the use of navigational lights.

Coast Guard Watchstanders in Sector San Juan alerted CBIG partner agencies, launched a MH-65 Dolphin helicopter to provide air support and diverted the Coast

Guard Cutter Margaret Norvell to interdict the go-fast. The crew of a Puerto Rico Police Department FURA marine unit also responded and supported the interdiction.

Throughout the pursuit, the Coast Guard aircrews vectored-in the cutter Margaret Norvell to the go-fast’s position. Once on scene, the Norvell’s crew launched the cutter’s Over-the-Horizon Boat IV that closed-in and interdicted the suspect vessel.

During the pursuit, the HC-144 Ocean Sentry crew observed multiple bales jettisoned into the water from the go-fast. The Coast Guard helicopter also vectored-in the crew of the Puerto Rico Police Department marine unit to the area of the jettisoned cargo, where the crew recovered three bales with 200 pounds of cocaine. The Norvell crew embarked the suspected smugglers along with the seized contraband.

The go-fast was destroyed as a hazard to navigation.

The detainees and seized contraband were transferred to the custody of DEA Special Agents assigned to CCSF, who are leading the investigation into this case.