

Coast Guard Offloads \$4.3 M in Seized Cocaine, Transfers Smugglers to DEA Custody



The crew of Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos interdicted a drug smuggling vessel in which the crew seized 176 kilograms of cocaine and apprehended two suspected smugglers off the coast of Rincon, Puerto Rico, Sept. 28, 2024. (U.S. Coast Guard photo)

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos offloaded 388 pounds (176 kgs) of seized cocaine and transferred custody of two smugglers to DEA Special Agents in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, Sunday.

The interdiction is the result of multi-agency efforts in support of the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force, while the seized cocaine is estimated to have a wholesale value of \$4.8 million dollars. The seized cocaine is estimated to have a wholesale value of \$4.3 million dollars.

The apprehended smugglers are U.S. citizens, who face federal prosecution in Puerto Rico on criminal charges including conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute a controlled substance aboard a vessel subject to the jurisdiction of the United States. The charges carry a minimum sentence of 10 years imprisonment and a maximum sentence of imprisonment for life. Special Assistant U.S. Attorney Helena B. Daniel and Max Pérez-Bouret, Chief of the Transnational Organized Crime Section are prosecuting the case.

During the morning of September 28, the crew of a Coast Guard HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft detected a suspicious 22-foot sport-craft vessel in international waters navigating towards

Rincón, Puerto Rico. Coast Guard watchstanders in Sector San Juan diverted the cutter Joseph Tezanos that arrived on scene and stopped the suspect vessel. Once alongside the suspect vessel, the Coast Guard crew located 142 brick-sized packages of suspected contraband inside the vessel, which tested positive for cocaine. The two persons onboard the vessel were arrested.

“I am extremely proud of my crew for their response and professionalism in disrupting organized crime within U.S. waters,” said Lt. Kali B. Carmine, Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos, commanding officer. “This successful interdiction and seizure underscore the collaboration and commitment of our federal, local, and regional partners in countering the flow of narcotics within the Caribbean, specifically the Mona Passage.”

“I congratulate the United States Coast Guard personnel for this successful interdiction of an international drug smuggling venture,” said United States Attorney W. Stephen Muldrow. “We greatly appreciate the U.S. Coast Guard’s unwavering support and dedication to keeping Puerto Rico and our nation safe.”

“This operation underscores the incredible power of collaboration between agencies like the DEA, Coast Guard, and our federal and local partners. It is through this unified effort that we can effectively combat transnational criminal organizations and disrupt their illegal activities. The teamwork demonstrated in this case is a shining example of how, when we come together with a shared mission, we strengthen our ability to protect the citizens of Puerto Rico the U.S. mainland and abroad from the scourge of drug trafficking. These partnerships are not just critical—they are the cornerstone of our success in keeping our communities safe,” said Denise Foster, Special Agent in Charge, DEA Caribbean Division.

This interdiction, seizure and prosecution is part of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF) Strike Force Initiative, which provides for the establishment of permanent multi-agency task force teams that work side-by-side in the same location. This co-located model enables agents from different agencies to collaborate on intelligence-driven, multi-jurisdictional operations to disrupt and dismantle the most significant drug traffickers, money launderers, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations. The specific mission of the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force (CCSF) is to identify, disrupt, and dismantle Transnational Criminal Organizations. The CCSF is comprised of agents and officers from the Drug Enforcement Administration, Federal Bureau of Investigation, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security Investigations, United States Coast Guard Investigative Service, and United States Marshals Service, and prosecution is being led by the Office of the United States Attorney for the District of Puerto Rico.

U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Joseph Tezanos is 154-foot fast response cutter homeported in San Juan, Puerto Rico.