

Coast Guard Transfers \$6.8M in Cocaine, 4 Suspected Smugglers to Federal Agents



The crew of the Coast Guard Cutter Venturous (WMEC-625) transfers custody of four suspected smugglers and \$6.8 million dollars of seized cocaine to federal law enforcement authorities in San Juan, Puerto Rico Oct. 15, 2020. U.S. Coast Guard

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico – The Coast Guard Cutter Venturous (WMEC-625) transferred custody of four suspected smugglers and 246 kilograms of seized cocaine to federal law enforcement authorities at Sector San Juan Oct. 15, following the interdiction of a drug smuggling go-fast vessel in the Caribbean Sea.

The interdiction was the result of 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) program and the Caribbean Corridor Strike Force (CCSF). The United States Attorney’s Office for the District of Puerto Rico is leading the prosecution for this case.

The estimated wholesale value of the seized drug shipment is more than \$6.8 million.

“Successful outcomes as in this case are a testament to the strong relationships between the Coast Guard and participating partner agency units who share an unwavering resolve to stopping drug smuggling vessels at sea,” said Lt. Andrew Russo, U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Heriberto Hernandez (WPC-1114) commanding officer. “The crew of the Heriberto Hernandez is proud to help safeguard the Caribbean and our nation’s southernmost maritime border to protect our fellow citizens in

Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands against this threat.”

The bust occurred during the evening hours of Oct. 5 and early morning hours of Oct. 6, 2020, after the aircrew of a U.S. Customs and Border Protection Air Marine Operations aircraft detected a suspicious panga style 35-foot go-fast vessel in Caribbean Sea waters near the Dominican Republic. Coast Guard watchstanders in Sector San Juan directed the launch of a Coast Guard Air Station Miami HC-144 Ocean Sentry aircraft, which relieved the CBP aircraft and maintained aerial coverage of the go-fast throughout the interdiction.

The cutter Heriberto Hernandez responded to the sighting and interdicted the go-fast vessel with the assistance of the cutter’s small boat. During the interdiction, the Coast Guard boarding team seized eight bales of suspected contraband, which tested positive for cocaine.

The crew of the cutter Heriberto Hernandez embarked four men from the go-fast, two Venezuelan, a Colombian and a Dominican Republic national, along with the seized contraband. The cutter Venturous transported the suspected smugglers and contraband to San Juan, Puerto Rico, where they were transferred to awaiting Caribbean Corridor Strike Force federal law enforcement agents.

Cutter Heriberto Hernandez is a 154-foot fast response cutter homeported in San Juan, Puerto Rico, while the Cutter Venturous is a medium endurance cutter homeported in St. Petersburg, Florida.