



Inside ICE

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Fugitive Operation Nets 179 Illegal Aliens in Las Vegas Area



ICE officer arresting one of 179 immigration violators recently captured in the Clark County, Nev., fugitive operation.

LAS VEGAS—In a major six-day operation, ICE officers from three states fanned out across Clark County, arresting a total of 179 immigration violators, many of whom have outstanding orders of deportation.

The arrests are part of ICE's national fugitive operations initiative, an enforcement strategy targeting illegal aliens who have been ordered deported by an immigration judge and failed to comply with those orders. It is

estimated there are more than 500,000 such fugitive aliens currently in the United States.

The majority of the aliens arrested during the Las Vegas area operation are Mexican nationals, but the group also included immigration violators from seven other nations—Iraq, Egypt, Peru, the Philippines, Samoa, El Salvador and Guatemala. Since many of these individuals have already been through immigration proceedings,

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ICE's Fugitive Operations Initiative Targets Illegal Aliens

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they are subject to immediate removal from the country. So far, more than 130 of the aliens taken into custody have already been removed from the United States.

Several of those taken into custody during this week's operation have criminal records, including past convictions for drug violations, assault and weapons charges. Among those arrested was Nery De Leon, a 31-year-old Guatemalan national with suspected ties to the 18th Street Gang who was sentenced to four years in prison in California during the early 1990s for transporting drugs. ICE is seeking to federally prosecute De Leon for re-entry after deportation, a felony punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

ICE fugitive operations teams from Los Angeles and Phoenix traveled to Las Vegas to work in concert with local ICE officers on the enforcement effort. ICE also received substantial assistance in the operation from the Nevada Department of Public Safety Parole and Probation Division.

So far this fiscal year (October 2005-April 2006), ICE fugitive operations teams nationwide have made more than 12,000 arrests, including nearly 6,000 criminal aliens. Of the aliens arrested, more than 6,800 have been removed from the United States. The four fugitive operations teams responsible for covering the Los Angeles area and Las Vegas have made more than 2,000 arrests during that same time frame.

The fugitive operations initiative is an integral part of the second phase of the Secure Border Initiative (SBI), a comprehensive multi-year plan launched by the Department of Homeland

Security to secure America's borders and reduce illegal migration. Under SBI, Homeland Security seeks to gain operational control of both the northern and southern borders, while re-engineering the detention and removal system to ensure that illegal aliens are removed from the country quickly and efficiently. The SBI also involves strong interior enforcement efforts, including enhanced worksite enforcement, and intensified efforts to track down and remove illegal aliens inside this country.

There are 38 fugitive operations teams nationwide and ICE expects to expand that number to 52 by the end of the year. The long-term goal of the program is to eliminate the backlog of immigration fugitives in the United States and ensure that the number of aliens deported each year equals the number of final removal orders issued by the immigration courts.

Inside ICE is an e-newsletter produced by the ICE Office of Public Affairs to inform the public about the mission, operations and activities of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Agents Dismantle Fraud Ring that Scammed U.S. Victims Out of Millions

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Twenty-four individuals in Costa Rica and the United States have been charged with criminal violations pursuant to a three-year investigation into an international sweepstakes scam that defrauded more than 2,000 U.S. victims out of at least \$20 million. To date, 19 individuals have been arrested in the investigation, which was conducted by ICE, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Commerce Department and other agencies. Five suspects remain at large.

The investigation began in September 2003 when ICE agents in Miami received information from ICE officials in Montana about victims of a

sweepstakes scam that was allegedly being perpetrated by individuals in Miami. ICE agents began working closely with their counterparts and developed evidence to execute federal search warrants at the Miami offices of Knot Data, LLC and Columbia Productions Inc. in August 2004.

Evidence from the searches indicated that these businesses re-sold Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) technology, manufactured by Vonage, to individuals in Costa Rica. VoIP technology allows individuals to make phone calls that appear to be from any U.S.-based area code chosen by the caller, regardless of the actual location from which the call originates.

Bogus Foreign Sweepstakes Winnings

During their pitch to victims, the fraudsters in Costa Rica typically claimed to be a “U.S. Customs” official or a representative of another federal agency. They would then tell the victims that they had won second prize in a foreign sweepstakes and that, to collect the prize money, the victims needed to send via Western Union anywhere from \$1,000 to several thousand dollars to an “insurance entity” in Costa Rica as a “refundable insurance fee.” Victims sent wire transfers to Costa Rica to claim the prizes, but never received any money.

Once the victim had wired the money to Costa Rica, the fraudsters

would often call the victims back and inform them that they had actually won first prize and that they needed to wire thousands of additional dollars in fees in order to ensure the safe delivery of the prize money. The defendants and their co-conspirators continued to call victims with this pitch as long as the victims continued to wire money to Costa Rica. None of the victims ever received any prize money.

It is believed that more than 2,000 U.S. victims were defrauded out of at least \$20 million through this international sweepstakes fraud.

Professional Victim List Brokers

During the course of the investigation, ICE agents also identified so-called “list brokers” who sold lists of individuals in the United States who had been targeted and/or successfully scammed by deceptive contests, lotteries, sweepstakes and other offers. The investigation revealed that these brokers had leased or sold lists of fraud victims to operators of the telemarketing boiler rooms in Costa Rica.

Further investigation revealed that those purchasing VoIP technology in Costa Rica from the Miami companies were operating fraudulent telemarketing boiler rooms.

Working closely with Costa Rican authorities, ICE agents and their counterparts determined that the operators of the telemarketing boiler rooms in Costa Rica were calling thousands of victims throughout the United States and using VoIP technology to make it appear as though their calls were coming from Washington, D.C., area codes and other locations in an effort to add validity to their fraudulent solicitations. ■

Los Angeles Man Pleads Guilty to Attempting to Ship Sensitive Technology to Iran

LOS ANGELES—A Los Angeles man pleaded guilty on May 8 to charges he attempted to illegally ship sophisticated pressure sensors to Iran in violation of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA).

Mohammad Fazeli, 27, was arrested March 16 at his Los Angeles apartment by agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). At the hearing, Fazeli pleaded guilty to a one-count information, admitting that he sought to illegally export more than 100 Honeywell sensors. The sensors, which detect the pressure of liquid or gas, could potentially be used to detonate explosive devices.

Fazeli, who remains free on \$50,000 bond, is scheduled to be sentenced August 7. He faces a maximum penalty of up to 10 years for violating the IEEPA.

The investigation revealed that Fazeli ordered 103 pressure sensors in September 2004 through a Web site operated by an electronics company based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. According to the indictment, Fazeli told an unindicted co-conspirator that



High-tech pressure sensors a Los Angeles man attempted to export to Iran.

he had been contacted by a representative from that company advising him that he needed a license in order to export the devices. Despite that, after receiving the parts, Fazeli allegedly attempted to send them to the United Arab Emirates, with the understanding that the devices would ultimately be shipped to Iran.

Under the IEEPA, Iran has been subject to a trade embargo by the United States since the late 1970s. The Iranian Transactions Regulations expressly prohibit the sale, supply or transshipment of any goods, technology or services to Iran without prior authorization by the Treasury Depart-

ment's Office of Foreign Assets Control. Investigators say Fazeli had not received the required prior approval from the Treasury Department to export the pressure sensors.

ICE's Arms and Strategic Technology Investigations (ASTI) Unit is responsible for investigating the illegal export of U.S. military products and sensitive technology. In fiscal year 2005, ICE's ASTI Unit conducted more than 2,500 investigations into the illegal export of U.S. munitions and sensitive technology, resulting in 101 arrests, 70 indictments and 86 convictions. ■

Los Angeles Man Charged in ICE Probe for Having Sex with Minors in Thailand

LOS ANGELES—A 57-year-old Los Angeles man who formerly worked as an English teacher in Bangkok made his initial appearance in federal court on charges stemming from an investigation by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) that he engaged in illicit sexual conduct with underage boys while living in Thailand.

Steven Erik Prowler was arrested in May 2005 by the Royal Thai Police in Bangkok after the police, acting on a tip, saw two youths leaving the suspect's apartment. The boys, ages 15 and 16, subsequently told police that Prowler had paid them to engage in oral sex. Thai authorities contacted ICE agents in Bangkok immediately following the arrest. Thai authorities prosecuted Prowler for molesting the youths and he remained jailed on the local charges until being turned over to ICE last week.

Accompanied by ICE agents, Prowler returned from Bangkok to Los Angeles on May 13 to face allegations detailed in a criminal complaint of traveling with the intent to engage in illicit sexual conduct and engaging in illicit sexual conduct in foreign places, charges that each



Steven Erik Prowler was taken into custody by ICE agents after being turned over by authorities in Thailand.

carry a maximum sentence of up to 30 years in prison. The case is being prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Central District of California.

"The charges against this suspect are a direct result of the extraordinary cooperation we received from Thai law enforcement," said Kevin Kozak, acting special agent in charge of the ICE office of investigations in Los Angeles. "Some pedophiles mistakenly believe they can escape detection and prosecution by committing child sex crimes overseas. We are putting pedophiles on notice that ICE and its law enforcement partners here and abroad stand ready to pursue and

prosecute those who sexually exploit children."

Prowler is the third person to be prosecuted by the United States Attorney's Office for the Central District of California on child sex tourism charges under the provisions of the PROTECT Act, which was signed into law by President Bush three years ago. The PROTECT Act substantially strengthened federal laws against predatory crimes involving children outside the United States by adding new crimes, increasing sentences and modifying the burden of proof requirements for federal prosecutors to bring charges. ■



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.

ICE Observes National Police Week



In ceremonies held in Washington, D.C., ICE recognized those agents and officers who gave their lives in the line of duty during 2005. Included among those honored was Assistant Special Agent-in-Charge David Wilhelm who was killed on March 11, 2005 while attempting to subdue an escapee from a Fulton County, Ga., courthouse.

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