



U.S. Immigration  
and Customs  
Enforcement

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# News Release

## **TASK FORCE DISMANTLES INTERNATIONAL ECSTASY RING**

LOS ANGELES— A total of 13 defendants have been arrested in recent weeks for their involvement in an international drug ring that allegedly imported millions of doses of the club drug "Ecstasy" from Europe into the United States.

As a result of Operation Money Man, authorities have seized well over 300,000 doses of Ecstasy with a street value of nearly \$7 million.

Authorities in Los Angeles announced the case today following arrests Monday of five defendants and the seizure of approximately 160,000 tablets of Ecstasy (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, or MDMA). The case is the result of a joint, international undercover operation that included the Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Santa Monica Police Department, and Austrian and Czech authorities.

The five arrests this week, and eight other arrests in recent weeks, cap a two-year investigation known as Operation Money Man that was conducted by the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF), which includes agents from ICE and DEA, as well as investigators from the Santa Monica Police Department. The individuals arrested are accused of being part of an international coalition that trafficked in Ecstasy and laundering the monetary profits of the illegal trade.

According to criminal complaints filed in this case, the investigation began in March 2002 when ICE agents learned that a group comprised primarily of Israeli nationals were trafficking Ecstasy in the Los Angeles area. The investigation quickly focused on Eliyahu Marciano, the head of an organization that imported Ecstasy from Europe with help from associates in the Czech Republic. Over the last year, investigators believe the European ring shipped more than 7 million Ecstasy tablets from the Czech Republic to the United States, Australia, Poland and Russia. Criminal complaints filed in federal court in Los Angeles allege that Marciano and co-conspirators laundered drug trafficking proceeds through loan fraud and real estate transactions.

Those arrested on Monday were:

- Oskar Benes, 44, of Prague, who headed a European organization that shipped Ecstasy to Los Angeles;
- Vaclav Pitas, 50, of Prague, who oversaw distribution for Benes' organization;
- Nimrod Haim, 27, of Prague, who brokered Ecstasy deals between Pitas and Marciano ;
- Martin Celner, 40, of Brentwood, who is associated with Benes' organization; and
- Bohumil Chudoba, 62, of Santa Monica, who was arrested when he delivered approximately 160,000 Ecstasy tablets to an undercover law enforcement officer.

In June, ICE and DEA agents, aided by officers from the Santa Monica, Burbank, and Torrance Police Departments, the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, and the Los Angeles Interagency Metropolitan Police Apprehension Crime Task Force (IMPACT), arrested Marciano and six members of his organization. Those arrested were:

- Marciano, also known as "Lucky" and "Kuku" ("ponytail" in Hebrew), 29, of Hollywood;
- Hillel Shamam, 38, of Woodland Hills, who allegedly helped Marciano launder drug proceeds through real estate transactions;
- Sanny Assoulin, 30, of Sherman Oaks, an alleged Ecstasy distributor;
- Vladimyr Frazilus, 35, of Aliso Viejo and West Los Angeles, who trafficked in Ecstasy;
- Edens Guerrier, 29, of West Hollywood, who allegedly purchased Ecstasy from Marciano and acted as a courier;
- Vince Wilson, 39, of Paramount, who allegedly arranged for the transportation of Ecstasy to the United States on behalf of Marciano; and
- Tyreisha Lashon Baldwin, 20, of Watts, who allegedly traveled to Belgium to ship Ecstasy tablets to the United States.
- A 13th defendant in the case, Yossi Mashiah, 46, an illegal alien, was in state custody on narcotics charges at the time of the takedown.

Marciano is being held without bail. The government has until October 26 to indict him and the other defendants.

Michael J. Garcia, Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, stated: "These criminals trafficked Ecstasy and laundered their profits through bank fraud and real estate transactions. This investigation demonstrates the global reach of federal law enforcement to take drugs off the street and seize the profits from these criminal networks."

Throughout the investigation, American law enforcement received substantial support from the Austrian National Police, the Belgium Federal Police, the Czech National Police, the Spanish National Police, and the Israeli National Police.

# ICE #

*U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). ICE seeks to prevent acts of terrorism by targeting the people, money and materials that support terror and criminal networks.*