



Department of Justice

United States Attorney John W. Vaudreuil
Western District of Wisconsin

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CONTACT: Robert A. Anderson
PHONE: (608) 264-5158
TTY: (608) 264-5006

Ten Year Sentences Handed down to Men Who Grew Marijuana in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

Madison, Wis. - John W. Vaudreuil, United States Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin, announced that Cesar Tinoco, 21, Abraham Ramirez, 29, and Jorge Lopez-Ontiveros, 25, all citizens of Mexico, were each sentenced this week by U.S. District Judge Barbara B. Crabb to ten years in federal prison for their involvement in a conspiracy to manufacture marijuana in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest during 2011. All three men pleaded guilty to the conspiracy charge in November of 2011.

Evidence summarized by the government at the plea hearings established that Tinoco, Ramirez and Lopez-Ontiveros were apprehended in early August 2011 along with Jose Esqueda-Garcia, 19, of Mexico, Moises Lopez-Ontiveros, 21, of Mexico, and Norberto Burciaga, 40, of St. Paul, Minnesota, after the marijuana grow they tended in the forest was raided by more than 200 law enforcement officers from over a dozen different local, state and federal agencies. The grow location had initially been discovered in November of 2010 by hunters who reported the find to police. Police monitored the area in 2011 to determine if persons involved in the grow would return

to use the area again. After months of monitoring and surveillance, law enforcement officers raided the campsite of the suspected growers and seized over 9,400 marijuana plants that had been planted, fertilized and watered by the men. Initially, four of the five men at the camp eluded capture until the following day when Burciaga arrived from Minnesota to pick them up. Sawyer County deputies observed Burciaga's truck, which investigators were familiar with based on the surveillance over the summer, and stopped it as it headed back toward Minnesota, apprehending Burciaga and four of the suspects who had fled and stayed in the forest overnight.

The three remaining defendants, Norberto Burciaga, 40, St. Paul, Minn., Jose Esqueda-Garcia, 19, Mexico, and Moises Lopez-Ontiveros, 21, Mexico, will be sentenced within the next two weeks.

The charges against the defendants were the result of an investigation by the Wisconsin Department of Justice - Division of Criminal Investigation; Ashland County Sheriff's Department; Drug Enforcement Administration; U.S. Forest Service; Federal Bureau of Investigation; Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources; Northwest Area Crime Unit (comprised of Sawyer, Douglas and Washburn County Sheriffs' Departments and Superior Police Department); U.S. Customs and Border Protection; and Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission. The prosecution of the case has been handled by Assistant U.S. Attorney Robert A. Anderson.

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