



Department of Justice

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OPERATION PIPE DREAMS PUTS 55 ILLEGAL DRUG PARAPHERNALIA SELLERS OUT OF BUSINESS

National Sweep Shuts Down Retailers, Distributors And Internet Sites

WASHINGTON, D.C.-- Attorney General John Ashcroft and U.S. Attorney Mary Beth Buchanan of the Western District of Pennsylvania today announced the indictment of 27 individuals on charges of trafficking in illegal drug paraphernalia. The charges, contained in 17 separate indictments, are the culmination of a nationwide investigation code-named "Operation Pipe Dreams," and include 10 indictments against national distributors of drug paraphernalia and seven indictments involving businesses located in Western Pennsylvania.

"With the advent of the Internet, the illegal drug paraphernalia industry has exploded," Ashcroft said. "The drug paraphernalia business is now accessible in anyone's home with a computer and Internet access. And in homes across America we know that children and young adults are the fastest growing Internet users. Quite simply, the illegal drug paraphernalia industry has invaded the homes of families across the country without their knowledge. This illegal billion-dollar industry will no longer be ignored by law enforcement. Today, the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force, under the leadership of Deputy Attorney General Larry Thompson and Associate Deputy Attorney General Karen Tandy has taken decisive steps to dismantle the illegal drug paraphernalia industry by attacking their physical, financial and Internet infrastructures."

The Drug Enforcement Administration led the investigation and was assisted by OCDETF members from the U.S. Marshals Service, U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Postal Inspection Service, and the U.S. Customs Service.

The defendants have been charged with conspiracy to sell and offering to sell various types of drug paraphernalia, in violation of 21 U.S.C. Sections 846, 853 and 863. Federal law defines drug paraphernalia as those products that are primarily intended or designed to be used in ingesting, inhaling or otherwise using controlled substances, and include user-friendly and dealer-friendly devices. Items such as miniature scales, substances for "cutting" or diluting raw narcotics, bongs, marijuana pipes, roach clips, miniature spoons and cocaine freebase kits, among other things, are all considered drug paraphernalia.

All the defendants are alleged to have knowingly, intentionally and unlawfully sold the items for use with illegal narcotics. Many of the items were disguised as common objects such as lighter