

Largest International Operation Against Darknet Trafficking of Fentanyl and Opioids Results in Record Arrests and Seizures

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Today, the Department of Justice, and its Joint Criminal Opioid and Darknet Enforcement (JCODE) team and international partners, announced the results of Operation SpecTor, which included 288 arrests – the most ever for any JCODE operation and nearly double that of the prior operation. Law enforcement also conducted more seizures than any prior operation, including 117 firearms, 850 kilograms of drugs that include 64 kilograms of fentanyl or fentanyl-laced narcotics, and \$53.4 million in cash and virtual currencies.

Operation SpecTor was a coordinated international effort spanning three continents to disrupt fentanyl and opioid trafficking on the darknet, or dark web. The operation was conducted across the United States, Europe, and South America, and was a result of the continued partnership between JCODE and foreign law enforcement against the illegal sale of drugs and other illicit goods and services on the darknet. Operation SpecTor builds on the successes of prior years' operations and takedowns of marketplaces, which result in the seizure of darknet infrastructure providing investigators across the world with investigative leads and evidence. JCODE and Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) continue to compile intelligence packages to identify entities of interest. These leads allow U.S. and international law enforcement agencies to identify darknet drug vendors and buyers, resulting in a series of coordinated, but separate, law enforcement investigations, resulting in the statistics announced today.

This year's law enforcement operation was accompanied by a public awareness campaign called Operation ProtecTor aimed to promote public safety and spread awareness of resources for those struggling with substance abuse and who go through extreme lengths to obtain opioids. JCODE has worked with every FBI field office in the country to facilitate outreach to households that have purchased individual amounts of opioids from the darknet. The interagency efforts are aimed to both identify those who use anonymizing technologies to purchase illicit narcotics and direct them to available resources.

"Operation SpecTor was a coordinated international law enforcement effort, spanning three continents, to disrupt drug trafficking on the dark web and represents the most funds seized and the highest number of arrests in any coordinated international action led by the Justice Department against drug traffickers on the dark web," said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland. "Our message to criminals on the dark web is this: You can try to hide in the furthest reaches of the internet, but the Justice Department will find you and hold you accountable for your crimes."

"The availability of dangerous substances like fentanyl on dark net marketplaces is helping to fuel the crisis that has claimed far too many American lives," said FBI Director Christopher Wray. "That's why we will continue to join forces with our law enforcement partners around the globe to attack this problem together. The FBI is proud to stand with our domestic and foreign partners as we continue to shine that light into the deepest corners of the dark net and hold those accountable who continue to peddle this poison around the world."

"The Sinaloa and Jalisco drug cartels, and the global networks they operate are killing Americans by sending fentanyl into the United States. Their associates distribute this fentanyl into communities across America by every means possible, including the dark web," said DEA Administrator Anne Milgram. "The DEA is committed to shutting down the fentanyl supply chain from beginning to end, and we will relentlessly pursue the associates of these cartels wherever they hide, even in the dark corners of the internet."

"Our coalition of law enforcement authorities across three continents proves that we all do better when we work together," said Executive Director Catherine De Bolle of Europol. "This operation sends a strong message to criminals on the dark web: international law enforcement has the means and the ability to identify and hold you accountable for your illegal activities, even on the dark web."

"Collaboration with our law enforcement partners is key to combatting fentanyl and opioid trafficking," said Chief Jim Lee of the IRS Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI). "Under the JCODE umbrella, law enforcement agencies across the globe have joined forces to take down criminals who use the darknet to buy and sell narcotics. Our team at IRS-CI plays an integral role in these investigations by following the money trail, whether it's in fiat currency or digital assets on the blockchain."

"The illicit movement of opioids poses a significant threat to public health and safety – whether by known transnational criminal gang members across international borders or anonymously through darknet spaces," said Senior Official Performing the Duties of Deputy Director P.J. Lechleitner of Homeland Security Investigations (HSI). "Our HSI special agents, alongside federal and international partners, continue to aggressively investigate, disrupt, and dismantle networks responsible for trafficking dangerous, deadly narcotics and other contraband across global communities we are charged with protecting. We will continue to pursue bad actors engaged in these crimes to ensure they face justice, while protecting victims from these lethal substances."

"The U.S. Postal Inspection Service leverages our specialized knowledge of the postal system as part of sophisticated dark web investigations such as Operation SpecTor with great results," said Chief Postal Inspector Gary R. Barksdale of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service. "We are committed to taking all necessary actions to combat illicit drugs in the mail. And we thank our law enforcement partners for working with us to achieve this; removing dangerous illicit substances from the mail and American communities saves lives."

"Addressing our nation's drug overdose crisis and epidemic of substance use disorders is an issue of great concern and remains a top public health priority for the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA)," said Commissioner Robert M. Califf, M.D., of the FDA. "The FDA has undertaken strategic and impactful actions to prevent drug overdoses and reduce deaths and is committed to using all of our cyber-resources to shed light on the darkest corners of illicit medical supply chains for the health and safety of all Americans."

Operation SpecTor resulted in over 100 federal operations and prosecutions, including:

On Dec. 1, 2022, Anton Peck, 29, of Boca Raton, Florida, was sentenced to 16 years in prison for conspiring to possess with the intent to distribute controlled substances, including fentanyl, methamphetamine, and heroin. According to court documents, between May 2021 and May 2022, Peck distributed narcotics from various darknet markets using the vendor profile "Syntropy." After the transactions were carried out using cryptocurrency, Peck and co-conspirators Kevin Fusco and Vincent Banner mailed parcels containing fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine to cities around the country using the U.S. Postal Service (USPS). Fusco, 35, of West Palm Beach, Florida, was sentenced to 11 years in prison for conspiring to distribute fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine. Banner, 31, of Boynton Beach, Florida, is scheduled to be sentenced on June 8 after pleading guilty to one count of conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute fentanyl, methamphetamine, and heroin. Law enforcement recovered kilogram quantities of fentanyl, cocaine, methamphetamine, and heroin from business and storage locations in West Palm Beach, Boca Raton, and New York City. Peck possessed a list of more than 6,000 customers living across the United States. The DEA, FBI, USPS Office of Inspector General (USPS-OIG), U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) and the Palm Beach County Sheriff's Office investigated the case. The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida is prosecuting the case.

On Nov. 18, 2022, a federal grand jury returned an indictment charging Christopher Hampton, 36, of Cerritos, California, with heading an organization that obtained bulk fentanyl, operated labs in California that used high-speed pill presses to create fake pills containing fentanyl and methamphetamine, and sold millions of pills to thousands of customers on the darknet. Hampton was named in an 11-count indictment that charges him with various narcotics and weapons offenses that could result in a sentence of life in prison. According to court documents, he was active on at least nine darknet marketplaces where he typically used the moniker "Narco710." Hampton allegedly sold nearly \$2 million worth of narcotics on two of these darknet marketplaces alone. He was arrested on Nov. 2, 2022, at which time federal law enforcement executed search warrants that led to the discovery and seizure of 450 pounds of suspected narcotics; six pill press machines, some of which were capable of producing thousands of pills per hour; and illegal firearms that included assault rifles and a machine gun.

Agents later located a storage unit linked to the drug conspiracy and seized over 80 pounds of pressed fentanyl pills, eight guns, and precursor materials to press additional pills. The FBI JCODE and DEA HIDTA Tactical Diversion Squad investigated the case. The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Central District of California is prosecuting the case.

On May 12, 2022, a federal grand jury returned a two-count indictment charging Holly Adams, 31, and Devlin Hosner, 33, of Indio, California, with conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute fentanyl and methamphetamine, and with conspiracy to launder money. According to court documents, Adams and Hosner operated the vendor accounts "igogrrawwr" and "its4real" on the darknet marketplaces ToRReZ and Darkode, respectively, through which they sold tens of thousands of counterfeit oxycodone pills containing fentanyl in exchange for cryptocurrency. Adams and Hosner shipped these fentanyl pills to buyers throughout the United States, using the USPS, UPS, and other means of delivery. In the course of their conspiracy, Adams and Hosner finalized over 1,100 transactions of narcotics and other contraband and received more than \$800,000 in cryptocurrency. Federal law enforcement officers executed a search warrant at a hotel in Riverside county where Adams and Hosner were residing and recovered more than 10,000 counterfeit oxycodone pills as well as approximately 60 grams of methamphetamine. The IRS-CI, HSI, FBI, USPIA, and USPS-OIG investigated the case. The U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of California is prosecuting the case.

Operation SpecTor was a collaborative initiative across JCODE members, including the Department of Justice, FBI, DEA, USPIA, HSI, IRS-CI, ATF, Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS), and the FDA's Office of Criminal Investigations. This operation was aided by non-operational supporting participation from the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Local, state, and other federal agencies also contributed to Operation SpecTor investigations through task force participation and regional partnerships. The investigations leading to Operation SpecTor were significantly aided by support and coordination by the Justice Department's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Forces (OCDETF); multi-agency Special Operations Division; the Criminal Division's Computer Crime and Intellectual Property Section, Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section's Digital Currency Initiative, Narcotic and Dangerous Drug Section, and Fraud Section; the Justice Department's Office of International Affairs; Europol and its Dark Web team; and international partners. The international partners include Eurojust; Austria's Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt); France's Directorate-General of Customs and Indirect Taxes (Douane); Germany's Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt), Central Criminal Investigation Department of Oldenburg (Zentrale Kriminalinspektion Oldenburg), General Prosecutor's Office in Frankfurt/Main - Cybercrime Center (Generalstaatsanwaltschaft Frankfurt/Main, Zentralstelle zur Bekämpfung der Internetkriminalität), Berlin Police (Polizei Berlin), various police departments (Dienststellen der Länderpolizeien), German Customs Investigation (Zollfahndungsämter); the Netherlands' National Police (Politie); Poland's Central Cybercrime Bureau (Centralne Biuro Zwalczenia Cyberprzestępczości); Brazil's Civil Police of the State of Piauí (Polícia Civil do Estado do Piauí), Civil Police of the Federal District (Polícia Civil do Distrito Federal), National Secretariat of Public Security - Directorate of Integrated Operations and Intelligence - Cyber Operations Laboratory (Laboratório de Operações Cibernéticas da Diretoria

de Operações Integradas e de Inteligência - Secretaria Nacional de Segurança Pública); Switzerland's Zurich Cantonal Police (Kantonspolizei Zürich) and Public Prosecutor's Office II of the Canton of Zurich (Staatsanwaltschaft II); and the United Kingdom's National Crime Agency (NCA) and National Police Chief's Council (NPCC).

Federal investigations and prosecutions are being conducted in more than 30 federal districts, including the District of Arizona, the Central District of California, the Eastern District of California, the Northern District of California, the Southern District of California, the District of Colorado, the District of Connecticut, the District of Columbia, the District of Delaware, the Southern District of Florida, the Northern District of Georgia, the Southern District of Indiana, the Eastern District of Kentucky, the District of Maryland, the District of Massachusetts, the Eastern District of Michigan, the Western District of Michigan, the Eastern District of Missouri, the Western District of Missouri, the District of Nebraska, the District of Nevada, the District of New Jersey, the Eastern District of New York, the Southern District of New York, the Western District of North Carolina, the Northern District of Ohio, the Southern District of Ohio, the Eastern District of Pennsylvania, the Middle District of Pennsylvania, the District of South Dakota, the Eastern District of Tennessee, the Eastern District of Texas, the Northern District of Texas, the Southern District of Texas, the District of Vermont, the Eastern District of Virginia, and the Western District of Washington.

The Justice Department established the FBI-led JCODE team to lead and coordinate government efforts to detect, disrupt, and dismantle major criminal enterprises reliant on the darknet for trafficking opioids and other illicit narcotics, along with identifying and dismantling their supply chains.

An indictment is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

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