

Statement by DEA Acting Administrator Timothy Shea
Operation Crystal Shield Press Conference
Phoenix, Arizona - September 10, 2020

(Remarks as prepared for delivery)

Last year we saw the single largest percent increase — a 28 percent jump — in overdose deaths from methamphetamine. More Americans now die from methamphetamine overdoses than from any other drug except fentanyl.

As part of our national strategy to shield American families and neighborhoods from deadly methamphetamine, we developed a plan to take on this growing threat. But then, just as we launched operations in February of 2020, the global pandemic hit.

Despite all the challenges we faced during a massive public health crisis, DEA and our state and local partners never stopped working. Together, as part of Operation Crystal Shield, we led more than 750 very successful investigations in key cities across the United States — in just six months.

As you heard from the Attorney General, the impact of this operation is clear. The large number of seizures and arrests have dealt a significant blow to the Mexican cartels and violent street gangs that seek to prey on innocent Americans.

But the impact of this operation can be felt far beyond the number of arrests and seizures. Every pound of methamphetamine seized represents American lives saved from the grip of drug abuse and addiction. Every dollar in profit confiscated from these organizations constrains their ability to function. And every weapon taken off the streets means less violent crime in our communities.

Operation Crystal Shield is an important component of our larger strategy to target the command and control of the cartels that profit from methamphetamine trafficking.

As you may know, since 2005, Congress has strictly regulated the domestic sale of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine—the chemicals used to produce meth. This means that methamphetamine is no longer produced in the U.S. in large quantities. Instead, it is manufactured on an industrial scale in Mexico, as much as several tons per week in a single clandestine lab.

In 2019 alone, Mexican cartels shipped hundreds of thousands of pounds of methamphetamine in tractor trailers and personal vehicles across our Southwest border and onto our nation's highways — then headed straight for our cities and towns across America. During COVID, we have seen these cartels shift their methods due to border restrictions but DEA and its federal, state, and local partners have remained vigilant and relentless.

All over the nation, we increasingly see traffickers smuggling in liquid meth, and then convert it into crystal meth in local labs here in the United States. The criminals who run these conversion labs present a very real danger to nearby law-abiding citizens and local law enforcement. We are

also seeing an increase in counterfeit prescription pills pressed with methamphetamine and fentanyl using pill presses like the one you see in this room. This is a deadly combination. In some cases, those pills contain more than what is considered a lethal dose.

Those who say drug trafficking is not a violent crime couldn't be more wrong. The firearms you see here today show that these traffickers are well armed and it also demonstrates that drug trafficking poses a serious threat to the health and safety of our communities. It helps fuel the violent crime not just in Phoenix, but across the country. Drug trafficking directly affects the safety and security of all of us. The criminals who engage in drug trafficking fuel the epidemic of addiction in our country — and profit from it — while feeding the violence that is plaguing so many of our communities.

That's why DEA is committed to working with our federal, state, and local law enforcement partners — every day — to disrupt, dismantle, and destroy the most violent drug trafficking organizations.

DEA partners with more than 3,000 state and local task force officers nationwide. Together, we built a highly effective team to drive down the threat from deadly methamphetamine and associated drug violence in our neighborhoods.

The spread of COVID did not stop the drug traffickers. And it did not stop us from actively pursuing investigations, reducing violent crime, seizing deadly drugs, and safeguarding American lives through Operation Crystal Shield.

Thank you.