

DOJ Press Conference  
Operation Chem Capture  
October 3, 2023  
DEA Administrator Milgram Remarks as Prepared

Fentanyl is the greatest threat to Americans today. It is devastating families across our country and killing Americans from all walks of life. And it is the leading cause of death for Americans between the ages of 18 and 45.

The Drug Enforcement Administration is actively targeting every single aspect of the global fentanyl supply chain—so that we can put an end to the most devastating drug crisis our country has ever seen.

The two drug cartels that are responsible for fentanyl coming into the United States are the Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartels. They work with chemical companies based in the People's Republic of China to get their raw materials, which are chemicals called fentanyl precursors. Nearly all fentanyl precursors come from China. These precursors are then turned into fentanyl.

But it doesn't stop there. Companies in China also manufacture other synthetic drugs—that make the fentanyl threat even more addictive and even more deadly. These drugs include xylazine and nitazenes, which are mixed with fentanyl to extend the high and increase the cartels' profits.

DEA has taken the lead in these cases, investigating and holding accountable the companies and individuals in China and elsewhere who are responsible for these poisons. Today, we announce 8 indictments, charging 8 companies and 12 individuals, for importing into the United States fentanyl precursors, xylazine, and other synthetic chemicals.

We have seized more than 80 kilograms of synthetic chemicals in these investigations—enough, when mixed with other chemicals, to make more than 48 million deadly doses of fentanyl.

As I said before, precursor chemicals are turned into deadly fentanyl, and xylazine and nitazenes are then added to make that fentanyl even deadlier—killing Americans, young and old.

Let's talk about xylazine. Xylazine is known on the street as "Tranq" and is a veterinary drug used to sedate animals, like horses and cattle. It has no legitimate use in humans. But drug traffickers mix xylazine with fentanyl because it extends the high and serves as filler. When it ends up in humans, it can cause human tissue to rot and lead to amputation. It also does not respond to Narcan, a drug used to prevent fentanyl poisoning. In other words—xylazine makes the deadliest drug threat, fentanyl, even deadlier.

DEA has seized xylazine-fentanyl mixtures in 48 of 50 states and in D.C. We know where this xylazine comes from—as powder from China and as liquid diverted from veterinary supply chains.

In one of the cases being announced today, DEA agents seized more than 300 grams of xylazine shipped from a company in China to Miami, and paid for in Bitcoin. That same company shipped xylazine to a fentanyl trafficker in Philadelphia multiple times a month. When agents conducted a search of the trafficker's home, they found 1,500 counterfeit pills, two pill presses, a powder mixture of fentanyl and xylazine, and two bottles of liquid xylazine.

Despite all this, xylazine is not yet a controlled substance. This is why it is so important for it to be scheduled.

We also found nitazenes in these cases. Nitazenes are dangerous synthetic opioids that can be as powerful, or even more powerful, than fentanyl. They have no legitimate use. In April 2022, based on the work of DEA chemists and agents, I signed an emergency scheduling order placing 7 nitazenes in Schedule I. In one of the cases announced today, companies and individuals in China are charged with shipping two of those nitazenes to Georgia and to South Florida.

In these cases, we also found fentanyl analogues, like fluorofentanyl. These analogues are a treacherous attempt to work around the law: every time we make one substance illegal, the drug cartels and their chemical suppliers switch to another that is slightly different at the molecular level but has the same effect. DEA is doing its part to schedule each fentanyl analogue it finds one at a time—but we need permanent class-wide scheduling of fentanyl related substances, and we stand ready to work with Congress to get this done for the American people.

Despite all of the different synthetic chemicals we found in these cases, a few things remained constant.

- The chemicals were cheap—a deadly dose for mere cents. At prices like these, the amount of deadly drugs that can be made is limitless.
- The chemicals were sold online. On public websites and through encrypted applications like WhatsApp, WeChat, and Wickr.
- The chemicals were shipped through common carriers, by air and by ground—through the postal service, UPS, and FedEx.
- The chemicals were carefully packaged to deceive customs inspectors.
- And the chemicals were paid for in every way—Western Union, MoneyGram, Paypal, Alibaba, bank transfers, and most commonly Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies, to make it harder to follow the money.

This is the unprecedented threat we are dealing with. And it is the reason why 110,757 Americans died from drug poisonings last year alone.

Today's indictments target the threat where it starts.

I want to thank the men and women of the

- DEA's Miami Field Division Counternarcotic Cyber Investigations Task Force
- DEA's Tampa District Office Chemical Express Group
- and our prosecution partners in the Southern and Middle Districts of Florida, specifically U.S. Attorneys Markenzy Lapointe and Roger Handberg, and the line prosecutors who all worked tirelessly on these investigations.

Today's charges continue DEA's work to target the global fentanyl supply chain. We will not relent, until this crisis ends. There is more to come.