

DEA Acting Administrator Uttam Dhillon Remarks

Operation Crystal Shield

February 20, 2020

DEA Atlanta Division Headquarters

(as prepared for delivery)

Good morning and thank you for taking the time to be here today. I am joined by Lt. Colonel Ryan Mehling and Major Heather Ray of the Cobb County Sheriff's Office, Major Michael O'Shields of the Clayton County Police Department and Lt. Charles Chapeau of the Georgia State Patrol. These brave men and women are responsible for the methamphetamine seizures in front of us.

We're here to announce Operation Crystal Shield, a drug law enforcement initiative that will attack the growing methamphetamine threat in the United States, and the global criminal organizations responsible for flooding our communities and neighborhoods with this deadly drug.

Operation Crystal Shield will focus enforcement efforts on eight methamphetamine distribution hubs — one here in Atlanta — and the other seven throughout the United States: Los Angeles, Phoenix, El Paso, Dallas, Houston, St. Louis, and New Orleans. DEA has identified all of these cities as methamphetamine distribution centers used by Mexican drug trafficking organizations to distribute methamphetamine throughout the entire country.

By targeting these distribution centers, DEA intends to intercept methamphetamine before it can be trafficked into our communities and neighborhoods.

Synthetic drugs like methamphetamine pose a significant threat to the health and safety of our citizens. While much of the focus has rightly been on synthetic opioids like fentanyl, in many places across the country, methamphetamine also poses a dangerous and powerful threat.

The Methamphetamine Epidemic Act of 2005, largely eliminated the production of methamphetamine in the United States.

As a result, virtually all of the methamphetamine trafficked into the United States is now produced, on an industrial scale, in Mexico by Mexican drug trafficking organizations who smuggle their inexpensive, high purity methamphetamine across the Southwest border to Atlanta as well as the other hub cities for distribution throughout the country.

This has resulted in record seizures along the Southwest Border, with a nearly 250 percent increase in methamphetamine seizures between 2013 and 2018. In 2018 alone, authorities seized nearly 43 tons of methamphetamine at the border. Notwithstanding these increased seizures, sadly, almost a million Americans today are addicted to methamphetamine.¹

¹ 1.6 million Americans reported using meth in past year in 2017 NSDUH, 964,000 people aged 12 and older had a meth use disorder in 2017. The average age of new meth users in 2016 was 23.3 years old. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/methamphetamine/what-scope-methamphetamine-misuse-in-united-states>

And in some parts of our country, methamphetamine kills more Americans than any other class of drug.²

Although there are challenges, there is also reason for optimism.

In 2018 – for the first time in nearly thirty years – drug poisoning deaths — deaths by drug overdose — decreased in the United States, largely due to a decline in the supply and abuse of prescription opioids.

That is a significant achievement that reflects a lot of hard work by DEA and all of our law enforcement, healthcare and drug prevention partners. It proves that with the resources — which this Administration has given us — and with a concerted effort, progress that may have seemed impossible just a few years ago can, in fact, be achieved.

We’ve seen that with opioids and that is why we are initiating *Operation Crystal Shield* – to apply those same principles of concerted effort — working with all of our partners here today and throughout the country — to reverse the dangerous emerging trends we are seeing with methamphetamine.

Through this effort, we will attack the entire supply chain, locating and seizing methamphetamine shipments at these major distribution hubs *before* they are broken down and trafficked into our communities and neighborhoods

In the newly released National Drug Control Strategy, the Administration set a goal to reduce the supply of methamphetamine across the nation.³

Operation Crystal Shield is part of that strategy — by building on existing DEA efforts to combat the illicit drug trade by bringing drug traffickers to justice, seizing their deadly drugs and keeping the American people safe from these remorseless criminals.

Surging enforcement efforts and resources in these eight cities — which includes an additional \$1 million to support Operation Crystal Shield — will reinforce the important work DEA and our law enforcement partners are already doing to ensure this deadly drug never makes its way into our communities and neighborhoods.

When we reduce the supply of methamphetamine and other drugs, we also reduce the violence, addiction, and death that they spread. That is DEA’s mission, and that is what we intend to achieve with *Operation Crystal Shield*.

It is now my pleasure to introduce the United States Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia, B. Jay Pak.

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² Meth, not fentanyl, driving overdose deaths in western US <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/meth-fentanyl-driving-overdose-deaths-western-us/story?id=66531404> 10/25/19 Based on CDC data” “In the majority of states west of the Mississippi River, methamphetamine was the most common drug implicated in drug overdose deaths according to the report, which utilized data from 2017, the latest available, and which was released Friday by the CDC.”

³ Goal 9 objective 3 to increase the average price of a pure gram of meth to \$120. Note that the average price of a pure gram of meth, according to price purity data in the 2019 NDTA (p 45) is \$56.00 per pure gram.