

Beat: News

Defendant Pleads Guilty in Fentanyl Overdose Case Featured on HBO Documentary

“The Crime of the Century”

San Diego, California, 22.06.2022, 06:48 Time

USPA NEWS - Cole Thomas Salazar pleaded guilty in federal court today, admitting that he supplied a fatal dose of fentanyl that resulted in the death of a 24-year-old woman who was found inside her Vista apartment on November 3, 2020.

According to his plea agreement, Salazar used an online classified ads service to offer controlled substances for sale. After communicating online with the victim - identified in court documents by the initials S.E.F. - Salazar sold fentanyl to S.E.F. on November 2, 2020, and she subsequently died from ingesting the fentanyl.

On January 10, 2021, law enforcement officials arrested Salazar, who possessed packages of heroin and fentanyl when he was taken into custody. A search of his nearby hotel room located numerous quantities of controlled substances including more fentanyl and dealer-related paraphernalia such as scales, baggies, and pay and owe sheets.

The plea agreement stipulates for Salazar that the commission of the offense of distribution of fentanyl resulting in death and/or serious bodily injury applies. The investigation and arrest of Salazar and his co-defendant, Valerie Lynn Addison, was featured on the HBO show “The Crime of the Century.” Addison pleaded guilty today to possession with intent to distribute fentanyl and methamphetamine.

“We speak often about how counterfeit pills that contain fentanyl endanger our community members,” said U.S. Attorney Randy Grossman. “We can’t lose sight of the fact that powdered fentanyl – which caused the death in this case - is extremely dangerous. To those drug dealers who would sell fentanyl in all its forms: Know that federal law enforcement will hold you accountable for any deaths that your sales cause.” Grossman thanked the prosecution team and investigating agencies for their excellent work on this case and unfortunately, many others like it.

“The investigators on the DEA Overdose Response Team work tirelessly to identify and arrest people who cause fentanyl overdose deaths, such as Cole Salazar,” said DEA Special Agent in Charge Shelly S. Howe. “Our mission is to hold dealers accountable and to save lives. In this case, that mission was accomplished by arresting Salazar and seizing additional fentanyl that could have killed others.”

“These guilty pleas are the result of joint efforts between Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), DEA, the San Diego Sheriff’s Department, the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office and the U.S. Attorney’s office, working tirelessly to identify criminals who profit from selling lethal drugs in the San Diego community,” said HSI San Diego Special Agent in Charge Chad Plantz. “HSI will continue to assist the DEA and our state and local partners to bring drug dealers to justice, while also aggressively pursuing drug cartels who smuggle dangerous drugs into the U.S.”

Salazar and Addison are scheduled to be sentenced on September 16, 2022, before U.S. District Judge Cathy Ann Bencivengo.

This case is the result of ongoing efforts by the U.S. Attorney’s Office, the San Diego County District Attorney’s Office, and the Drug Enforcement Administration to investigate and prosecute the distribution of dangerous illegal drugs—fentanyl in particular—that result in overdose deaths. The Drug Enforcement Administration created the Overdose Response Team as a response to the increase in overdose deaths in San Diego County. Investigators from the DEA Overdose Response Team led the investigation into S.E.F.’s death.

DEFENDANTS Case Number 21cr3518-CAB

Cole Thomas Salazar Age: 32 San Diego, CA

Valerie Lynn Addison Age: 40 San Diego, CA

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Salazar:

Possession with Intent to Distribute (Fentanyl) – Title 18, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1)

Maximum penalty: Twenty years in prison

Addison:

Possession with Intent to Distribute (Fentanyl and Methamphetamine) – Title 18, United States Code, Section 841(a)(1)

Maximum penalty: Twenty years in prison

AGENCY

Drug Enforcement Administration

Homeland Security Investigations

Federal Bureau of Investigation

California Department of Health Care Services

San Diego Sheriff's Department

San Diego Police Department

San Diego County District Attorney's Office

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Wendy writes for the United States Press Agency and is a former columnist with the Fulton County Expositor, Wauseon, Ohio.

Source: Department of Justice, U.S. Attorney's Office, Southern District of California press release June 17, 2022

Article online:

<https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-21102/defendant-pleads-guilty-in-fentanyl-overdose-case-featured-on-hbo-documentary.html>

Editorial office and responsibility:

V.i.S.d.P. & Sect. 6 MDStV (German Interstate Media Services Agreement): Wendy Westhoven

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Official Federal Reg. No. 7442619