



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FEDERAL JURY CONVICTS SECOND CO-DEFENDANT IN METH CONSPIRACY

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced today that a Hollister, Mo., man has been convicted by a federal jury for participating in a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine in Taney County, Mo.

Alonzo F. Ellerman, 42, of Hollister, Mo., was found guilty of two counts of a federal indictment, which alleged his participating in a conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine.

The jury in U.S. District Court in Springfield deliberated for two hours and 50 minutes before returning the guilty verdict to U.S. District Judge Richard E. Dorr, ending a trial that began Nov. 3, 2003.

Ellerman was convicted of conspiracy to distribute 500 grams or more of methamphetamine between as early as April 1998 and continuing until July 29, 2002, in Taney County, Mo. He also was found guilty of being a felon in possession of several firearms. Under federal law, Graves explained, it is illegal for any felon to be in possession of any firearm or ammunition. **Ellerman** was found guilty of being in possession of six firearms on Jan. 18, 2002. He has two 1982 criminal felony convictions for assault and burglary.

Ellerman is the second co-defendant to be convicted by a federal jury in this case.

Michael R. Burns, 54, of Branson, Mo., was found guilty of all three counts of the federal indictment on Oct. 30, 2003. His trial began on Oct. 27, 2003.

Burns was arrested on July 29, 2002, after selling methamphetamine to an undercover law enforcement officer. On Jan. 24, 2003, **Burns** was indicted for conspiracy to distribute 500 grams or more of methamphetamine in Taney County between April 1998 and July 29, 2002.

Burns was also charged with two counts of distributing 50 grams or more of methamphetamine in Taney County in separate incidents on June 7 and 25, 2002.

In addition to the to jury convictions, two more co-defendants have pleaded guilty and await sentencing in this case.

Sean L. Davis, 28, Branson, Mo., pleaded guilty on Sept. 15, 2003, to conspiracy to distribute 500 grams or more of methamphetamine. By pleading guilty, Graves said, **Davis** admitted that he received supplies of methamphetamine from **Burns**, which he redistributed to others in southwest Missouri.

On June 4, 2003, co-defendant **Howard A. Neustel**, 33, of Kirbyville, Mo., pleaded guilty to his role in the conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine. By pleading guilty, Graves said, **Neustel** also admitted that he received supplies of methamphetamine from **Burns**, which he redistributed to others in southwest Missouri.

Each of the defendants were originally charged in an indictment returned by a federal grand jury on Jan. 23, 2003, in Springfield.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Randy Eggert and Kimberly Weber-Dean. The case was investigated by COMET (the Combined Ozarks Multi-jurisdictional Enforcement Team) and the Branson, Mo., Police Department, with assistance from the sheriff's departments of Taney County and Greene County, Mo., and San Bernardino, Calif., the Santa Barbara Drug Task Force and the Drug Enforcement Administration.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at
www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow