

Coast Guard Southwest Reaches 50-ton Milestone with Pot Bust off Los Angeles



SAN PEDRO, Calif. — **San Francisco-based Coast Guard Cutter Aspen** seized approximately 8,500 pounds of marijuana from a vessel Wednesday some 160 miles west of Los Angeles. The event marks a 50-ton milestone for waterborne marijuana seizures in Southern California and the Pacific Southwest border region this fiscal year.

Fifty tons of pot has an estimated value of \$90.7 million. Contraband seized in Wednesday's bust, more than 340 bales, is worth about \$7.7 million.

Law enforcement authorities have seen an increase in waterborne smuggling of illicit drugs, as well as illegal immigrants, from the U.S.-Mexico border as far north as Santa Barbara County. Small boats — known as "pangas" — are popular among smugglers for moving multi-ton loads of marijuana and illegal immigrants from Baja California.

"Stopping these drugs from reaching our streets is a great accomplishment, but it's just the tip of the iceberg with respect to the impact on the drug trafficking organizations," said Capt. James Jenkins, commander of Coast Guard Sector Los Angeles/Long Beach. "The money from marijuana trafficking fuels a wider cycle of drug smuggling, crime and violence. We need to do everything possible to stop these destructive, deadly organizations. The more loads we interdict, the less money is available to feed further criminal activity."

The Coast Guard coordinates counter-narcotics patrols and interdiction operations in the region with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement and a number of other federal, state and local [agencies](#). Multi-agency planning, operations, and intelligence groups have been created to get the most out of each available patrol unit. As the flow increases, it becomes more difficult for officials to detect and intercept northbound loads. U.S. officials also coordinate counter-drug efforts in the region with their counterparts in Mexico.

"I'm very proud of [the work](#) being done by the **Aspen**, other interdiction crews from the Coast Guard and all the agencies involved," said Rear Adm. Karl Schultz, 11th Coast Guard District commander. "The public expects the best security and law enforcement

effort we can put forth and our people on the front lines deserve the best possible tools to do their [jobs](#).”

The 50-ton quantity is the total of 56 seizures of marijuana-laden boats or abandoned loads of drugs since October 1, 2011, and is four times the amount seized in the same area during the entire previous fiscal year.

The Aspen, a 225-foot buoy tender homeported at Yerba Buena Island in San Francisco, services aids-to-navigation from the Oregon-California border down south to San Diego. The ship also handles other Coast Guard missions including pollution response, search and rescue and law enforcement.