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\$6 Million Worth of Oregon Properties Forfeited in Connection to Interstate Marijuana Trafficking Organization

PORTLAND, Ore.—The U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon announced today that it has forfeited on behalf of the United States 14 real properties located in Oregon—together worth more than \$5.7 million—that were used by an interstate drug trafficking organization to illegally grow marijuana for redistribution and sale in other states. The owner of a 15th property agreed to pay the government \$400,000 in lieu of having their property forfeited.

Beginning at an unknown time, and continuing until September 2021, the properties, located in Clatsop, Columbia, Linn, Marion, Polk, and Yamhill counties, were used as illegal marijuana grow houses by an interstate drug trafficking organization led by Fayao "Paul" Rong, 53, of Houston, Texas. On July 19, 2023, after previously pleading guilty to conspiracy to manufacture marijuana, Rong was sentenced to 30 months in federal prison and five years' supervised release.

"This prosecution and yearslong effort to forfeit properties used by the Rong organization to grow and process thousands of pounds of marijuana demonstrate the long reach of our commitment to holding drug traffickers accountable and mitigating the damage these criminal organizations inflict on neighborhoods and communities," said Natalie Wight, U.S. Attorney for the District of Oregon.

"The goal of drug traffickers is to generate profits through their crimes," said David F. Reames, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), Seattle Field Division. "The DEA and our partners at the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon and the Oregon State Police worked hard in this case to investigate and forfeit the ill-gotten gains of this organization, benefiting our entire community."

"The Oregon State Police is committed to disrupting and dismantling drug trafficking organizations operating within our state. Our priorities include safeguarding Oregon's natural resources and mitigating the impact illicit marijuana has on them," said Tyler Bechtel, Oregon State Police (OSP) Lieutenant. "This case is a great example of the results that can be achieved when all levels of law enforcement work together toward our common goals."

According to court documents, Rong purchased numerous residential houses in Oregon using several different identities and, with others in his organization, used them to grow and process marijuana and prepare it for transport to states where its use remains illegal. In a 12-month period beginning August 2020, Rong's organization trafficked more than \$13.2 million dollars in black market marijuana.

In early September 2021, a coordinated law enforcement operation led by DEA and OSP targeted Rong's organization. Federal, state, and local law enforcement partners executed search warrants on 25 Oregon residences and Rong's home in Houston. During the precipitating investigation and ensuing search warrants, investigators seized nearly 33,000 marijuana plants, 1,800 pounds of packaged marijuana, 23 firearms, nine vehicles, \$20,000 in money orders, and more than \$591,000 in cash.

The Rong organization takedown followed a 14-month investigation initiated by OSP after the agency learned of excessive electricity use at the various properties, which, in several instances, resulted in transformer explosions. Multiple citizen complaints corroborated law enforcement's belief that Rong was leading a large black market marijuana operation. With the assistance of the Columbia and Polk County Sheriff's Offices, OSP found associated marijuana grows in Clatsop, Columbia, Linn, Marion, Multnomah, and Polk Counties. On February 18, 2022, Rong was [arrested](#) by DEA agents in Houston.

This case was investigated by DEA, OSP, and the U.S. Marshals Service with assistance from the FBI; Homeland Security Investigations; Oregon Department of Justice; Portland Police Bureau; the Yamhill, Clatsop, Marion, Multnomah, Columbia, and Polk County Sheriff's Offices; Central Oregon Drug Enforcement Team; and Linn Interagency Narcotics Enforcement Team. It was prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Oregon. Forfeiture proceedings were handled by the U.S. Attorney's Office's Asset Recovery and Money Laundering Division.

The proceeds of forfeited assets are deposited in the Justice Department's Assets Forfeiture Fund (AFF) and used to restore funds to crime victims and for a variety of other law enforcement purposes. To learn more about the AFF, please visit: <https://www.justice.gov/afp/assets-forfeiture-fund-aff>.

This prosecution is the result of an Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation. OCDETF identifies, disrupts, and dismantles the highest-level drug traffickers, money launderers, gangs, and transnational criminal organizations that threaten the U.S. by using a prosecutor-led, intelligence-driven, multi-agency approach that leverages the strengths of federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies against criminal networks.

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