



THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT of JUSTICE

United States Attorney's Office
Southern District of California

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
May 14, 2025
justice.gov/usao-sdca

Contact: Kelly Thornton
Director of Media Relations
Kelly.Thornton@usdoj.gov

Calexico Man Sentenced for Conspiring to Smuggle Unapproved Pesticides and Veterinary Drugs into the United States

SAN DIEGO — Ruben Montes, of Calexico, California, was sentenced today in federal court to 16 months in prison and ordered to pay \$12,710 in forfeiture for conspiring to smuggle and distribute more than \$3 million worth of Mexican pesticides and veterinary drugs that are not approved for use in the United States.

“Bringing in and selling pesticides and veterinary drugs illegally puts both people and the environment at risk,” said U.S. Attorney Adam Gordon for the Southern District of California. “These unregulated products can be harmful to animals, insects, and humans. Our office is committed to holding accountable anyone who chooses profit over public safety.”

“A secure border is vital to ensuring the health and safety of Americans,” said Acting Assistant Attorney General Adam Gustafson of the Justice Department’s Environment and Natural Resources Division (ENRD). “The Justice Department is committed to prosecuting those who violate our environmental and customs laws and jeopardize the health and safety of our citizens.”

According to filings and evidence presented in court, Montes coordinated the smuggling of pesticides and veterinary drugs from Mexico into the United States since 2020. The primary pesticides involved were Taktic and Bovitraz, which are not registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for use in the United States. The smuggled veterinary drugs included Tylocet, Terramicina, Tetragent Ares and Catarrol, which are not approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in the United States.

Montes requested that his co-conspirators bring pesticides and veterinary drugs — unavailable for purchase in the United States — from Mexico into the United States. Montes and his co-conspirators brought them into the United States without declaring them at the border. He and his co-conspirators then hid the pesticides and veterinary drugs in storage units in Calexico and retrieved them for distribution throughout the United States. Specifically, Montes and his co-defendant Gutierrez, who remains at large, supplied most of the pesticides and veterinary drugs to individuals charged in another case, *United States v. Toledo, et. al.*, (case number 22-cr-1965-JAH, in U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California). Montes was also involved in shipping about 150 packages of unapproved products to another co-conspirator in Texas.

According to the EPA, the active ingredient in the pesticides Taktic and Bovitraz is amitraz, which is toxic to bees if released into hives, and then ultimately to humans when it ends up in honey, honeycomb, and beeswax. Misuse of amitraz-containing products in beehives can result in exposures that could cause neurological effects and possibly reproductive effects in humans from the

consumption of contaminated honey. Signs of neurotoxicity from exposure to amitraz have been documented in multiple animal species and include central nervous system depression, decrease in pulse rate, and hypothermia.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Elizabet Brown for the Southern District of California and Assistant Section Chief Stephen Da Ponte of ENRD's Environmental Crimes Section prosecuted the case.

DEFENDANT

Case Number 23CR2377

Ruben Montes

Age: 60

Calexico, CA

SUMMARY OF CHARGES

Conspiracy – Title 18, U.S.C. Section 371

Maximum Penalty: Five years in prison and \$250,000 fine

INVESTIGATING AGENCIES

Homeland Security Investigations

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Criminal Investigations Division

U.S. Food and Drug Administration, Office of Criminal Investigations

California Department of Toxic Substances Control