

Hoquiam "Mushroom Kingpin" Sentenced to Four Years

Local News

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HOQUIAM, Wash. - A 62-year-old resident of Hoquiam, Washington was sentenced Friday in U.S. District Court in Tacoma to four years in prison followed by three years of supervised release for coordinating a network of hallucinogenic mushroom cultivators and dealers, announced U. S. Attorney Jenny A. Durkan. MICHAEL J. MAKI pleaded guilty in May, 2012, to conspiracy, cultivation, and distribution counts involving the illegal hallucinogenic mushrooms. U.S. District Judge Ronald B. Leighton agreed with the United States Attorney that a four-year prison term was appropriate given the scope of MAKI's activities and his leadership role in the criminal organization. In addition to the prison time, MICHAEL MAKI will forfeit to the government his home and rural compound in Grays Harbor County where he personally cultivated illegal mushrooms. The DEA's investigation into the mushroom cultivation and distribution ring began in October, 2009. DEA agents sought and obtained court permission to intercept calls on MAKI's cellular telephone. More conventional law enforcement techniques were not able to fully dismantle the organization because of the close-knit and long-term relationships of many of the participants, and because in general, the participants operated primarily from remote and private rural locations.

The wiretap and other evidence led to search warrants being executed at four rural mushroom cultivation sites -- including MAKI's home outside Hoquiam -- throughout Washington. DEA agents dismantled the sites and arrested six persons, including MICHAEL MAKI's son, Peter Maki, who was setting up a cultivation site in rural Whatcom County, and who had earlier sold illegal mushrooms to a cooperating witness at his father's direction. Judge Leighton said he particularly found MICHAEL MAKI's use of his own son in the criminal enterprise "despicable." Judge Leighton had earlier sentenced all five of MICHAEL MAKI's co-defendants, including his son Peter Maki, to sentences of time served to be followed by terms of supervised release in recognition of their lesser roles in the organization. Judge Leighton, however, found that MICHAEL MAKI was significantly more culpable and was in essence what he called a "Pied Piper" figure leading the other defendants in the mushroom organization. The government's evidence showed that MICHAEL MAKI sold or brokered the sale of hundreds of pounds of dried mushrooms representing hundreds of thousands of dosage units. On the day he was arrested, MICHAEL MAKI, for example, was on his way to sell another 60 pounds of dried mushrooms in four duffel bags for a negotiated price of \$30,000. Hallucinogenic mushrooms containing psilocybin are illegal controlled substances under federal law. It is illegal to cultivate, possess, or distribute them. According to information released by the National Institute on Drug Abuse at the National Institutes of Health, hallucinogenic mushrooms have "LSD-like properties and produce alterations of autonomic function, motor reflexes, behavior, and perception. The psychological consequences of psilocybin use include hallucinations, an altered perception of time, and an inability to discern fantasy from reality. Panic reactions and psychosis also may occur, particularly if a user ingests a large dose. Long-term effects such as flashbacks, risk of psychiatric illness, impaired memory, and tolerance have been described in the case reports," according to the institute. This was an Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation, providing supplemental federal funding to the federal and state agencies involved. The

case was investigated by DEA Offices in Seattle, Salt Lake City, Portland; Grays Harbor County Sheriff's Office; Thurston County Sheriff's Office; Lewis County Sheriff's Office; Pacific County Sheriff's Office; Washington State Patrol; Sandy (Utah) Police Department; and Washington County (Oregon) Sheriff's Office. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Mark Parrent.