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News Releases

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Truck driver re-sentenced to nearly 34 years in federal prison for his role in the deaths of 19 illegal aliens in Victoria, TX, in 2003

HOUSTON - The driver of the insulated tractor trailer used in a smuggling operation which left 19 aliens dead in the deadliest smuggling operation ever in the district was re-sentenced on Monday to 33 years and nine months imprisonment without the possibility of parole, announced U.S. Attorney José Angel Moreno, Southern District of Texas. The investigation was conducted by the Houston, San Antonio, Harlingen, Brownsville and McAllen, Texas, offices of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Homeland Security Investigations (HSI).

Tyrone Mapletoft Williams, 40, was re-sentenced by U.S. District Judge Lee H. Rosenthal to 405 months imprisonment on each of 19 counts of conviction - counts 40 through 58 of the indictment - relating to the 19 deceased victims of the ill-fated smuggling operation in May 2003. Williams was the driver of a tractor trailer discovered abandoned at a truck stop in Victoria, Texas, during the early hours of May 14, 2003.

Victoria law enforcement officers who arrived at the location came upon the bodies of 17 smuggled foreign nationals in and around the trailer who had died as a result of being transported inside Williams' insulated trailer. Two additional trailer occupants subsequently died of their injuries at Victoria-area hospitals. The resulting 19 deaths associated with this smuggling operation established it as the deadliest in the district.

Williams was originally sentenced to life imprisonment on each of these 19 counts of conviction by a jury's verdict. However, the case was remanded to the District Court for re-sentencing after the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals issued an opinion finding that Williams' punishment on these counts of conviction should have been assessed by the court and not the jury.

Williams was convicted by a jury of conspiring with others to transport and harbor illegal aliens for commercial advantage and financial gain. Williams' actions caused serious bodily injury, placed a life in jeopardy or caused death as alleged in count one of the indictment and further found his conduct placed a life in jeopardy. Judge Rosenthal previously sentenced Williams to 405 months imprisonment for this count of conviction which was upheld by the appellate court.

In counts 21 through 39, Williams was charged with unlawfully transporting 19 of the 55 surviving aliens. Judge Rosenthal had previously sentenced Williams to the statutory maximum sentence of 20 years imprisonment on each of these counts. These sentences were also upheld on appeal. The sentences on all counts of conviction are to be served concurrently. Williams has been in federal custody since his May 2003 arrest. He will remain in custody to serve out his sentences. There is no parole in the federal prison system.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Daniel C. Rodriguez, Jeffery Vaden and Tony R. Roberts. The case was investigated conducted by the Houston, San Antonio, Harlingen, Brownsville and McAllen, Texas, offices of ICE HSI, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of the Inspector General, the Texas Department of Public Safety including the Texas Rangers, the Victoria County Sheriff's Department, and police departments in McAllen, Harlingen and Victoria, Texas.

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