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NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Dozens face heroin charges after Task Force investigation

A multi-agency drug investigation – spearheaded by the Lake Superior Drug and Violent Crime Task Force -- into heroin trafficking in the Twin Ports has resulted in charges against 41 people.

The majority of the cases involved the sale of heroin and were uncovered during a lengthy investigation that law enforcement labeled "Operation Exile."

St. Louis County Attorney Mark Rubin joined Minnesota District U.S. Attorney Andrew Luger and other county attorneys and law enforcement officials from around the state in announcing the drug-busting operation today.

The local warrants charging the drug crimes are a substantial portion of the more than 150 warrants issued in a statewide investigation.

"The ugly reality of the heroin use and trafficking in our area is not just the individual addictive nature of the drug, but the consequences – including increased property crimes and heightened dangers for children in homes where the drug is used," Rubin said.

"Our reported child maltreatment cases continue to climb proportionately with the exposure to heroin use. We have statements from children describing heroin as the 'brown sugar in a plastic bag' on their parents' nightstand," Rubin added.

Authorities say that most of the drug being sold in Duluth is brown heroin, usually produced in Mexico. The drug commands a higher price in the Northland than in larger cities because dealers know they run a greater risk of getting busted here.

Heroin is an especially insidious drug. There have been several overdoses in Duluth in the past year because users rarely know how pure the heroin they buy from dealers may be.

Prosecutors say that heroin use has led to many harmful collateral consequences. Addiction to the drug leads users to do things they wouldn't normally do, break into cars, steal cars, burglarize homes and steal from their own families.

Assistant St. Louis County Attorney Jon Holets is the lead prosecutor in the cases.

“The credit for this monumental effort goes to our Duluth Police Department, St. Louis County Sheriff’s Office, law enforcement task forces around the state and to the leadership at the U.S. Attorney’s Office,” Rubin said of Operation Exile.

The local cases were developed after an investigation by the Lake Superior Drug and Violent Crime Task Force, which includes law enforcement officers from the St. Louis County Sheriff’s Office, Duluth, Superior, Cloquet and Hermantown police departments , the Carlton and Lake County sheriff’s offices, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Border Patrol, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Homeland Security and the Minnesota State Patrol.

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