

FACT SHEET
U.S.-ITALY ASSET SHARING CEREMONY, APRIL 1, 2014
DEA OPERATION FIRE & ICE

- In May 2008, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in Boston informed the DEA Rome County Office that a Colombian named Johan Leonardo Jaragui VARGAS (a.k.a.Leo), contacted a Boston DEA agent, acting in an undercover capacity, asking for assistance in laundering narcotics proceeds located in Italy.
- The DEA immediately contacted the Italian National Police with this information. Investigators learned that cocaine was regularly being shipped to Italy by members of a narco-trafficking and money laundering network called “La Oficina de Envigado.”
- The narco-traffickers advised the undercover agent that they had over ten million Euros in Italy and other places in Europe. Prosecutors in Rome authorized an undercover police operation, where DEA agents worked together with the Polizia Di Stato (PdS), Squadra Mobile, in Rome. This joint operation was part of the DEA’s larger international investigation called “Operation Fire and Ice.”
- On June 5, 2008, an undercover Italian police officer posed as a money launderer and met with representatives of the drug trafficking organization, named Roberto PANICHI and Alessandro AQUILA. At the meeting, PANICHI and AQUILA handed the agent €200,000 in cash.
- On November 13, 2008, an undercover Italian police officer picked up another €75,550 in Rome from representatives of the same drug trafficking organization. The PdS conducted an extensive follow up investigation which led them to the criminal network of “La Oficina de Envigado.”
- As a result of these undercover operations, Italian police were also able to identify Italian-based money laundering and drug trafficking organizations with direct links to criminal groups in South America.
- Italian authorities were able to intercept phones of Italian criminal targets, which were in contact with drug traffickers in Colombia, the Dominican Republic, and Guatemala. Police surveillance also revealed that PANICHI, AQUILA, and others smuggled bulk cash into the Republic of San Marino.
- In addition, the Italian targets of investigation were using Lebanese nationals in Rome to launder bulk cash for the Colombian narco-traffickers. In December 2009, Italian police searched a bag belonging to one of the Lebanese nationals at Fiumicino Airport and seized €550,000 in cash.
- On May 4, 2010, Italian police seized 225 kilograms of cocaine on a plane from the Dominican Republic to Fiumicino Airport.

- On May 14, Italian police arrested PANICHI, AQUILA, and four other Italian citizens on money laundering and drug trafficking charges. They also seized about €10,000,000 in assets.
- Italian prosecutors charged an additional nineteen targets on related drug and money laundering charges.
- The Italian undercover operation, together with similar undercover operations around the world, assisted the DEA in discovering that the drug traffickers stashed millions of dollars in drug proceeds at accounts at the Bank of America, of which \$27,000,000 was forfeited to the United States.
- The United States Department of Justice has the ability to share seized and forfeited assets with its law enforcement partners around the world. In recognition of Italy's important contribution to Operation Fire and Ice, the United States has sent \$1.5 million to the Italian government's asset forfeiture fund, or "Fondo Unico Giustizia." That is more than triple the amount of money that was involved in the Rome undercover operations.