

# Agents seize cocaine

## 1,600 kilos found in Dade warehouse

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MIAMI — Three Pembroke Pines residents are among 11 people from Dade and Broward counties nabbed in the past two days for taking part in one of South Florida's biggest drug smuggling operations in recent years, the FBI said on Thursday.

The members of the ring, who federal agents said have "direct ties" to Colombia's Cali cartel, are accused of smuggling 1,600 kilograms (about 3,500 pounds) of cocaine into South Florida, hidden inside cylinders normally used to transport propane gas.

"It was an innovative way to smuggle the drugs," said Paul Philip, special agent in charge of the Miami office.

Agents put the wholesale price of the cocaine at \$33 million and said its street value would jump to about \$200 million.

The coke was smuggled into South Florida inside cylinders 10-foot-long and 2½-feet in diameter. The cocaine was packed in boxes welded to the sides of the



AP photo/MARTA LAVANDIER

U.S. Customs agents show a portion of the 1,600 kilograms of cocaine seized on Wednesday in Miami.

cylinders, making it hard to detect. The cylinders apparently arrived at the Port of Miami in a cargo ship that cleared U.S. Customs.

On Wednesday, an 18-month investigation led police to the cylinders stored in a warehouse in southwest Dade. Agents and local police rounded up suspects on Wednesday and Thursday. All are charged with several counts of smuggling cocaine.

Mario Hernando Emura-Jamramillo, 31, of Miami Beach, and his sister Christina Bermudez, 32, of Miami, were both picked up in

the round-up.

Others arrested were Gerardo Velasquez, 34; Olga Arango, 47; and Jose Botero Alvaro, 30, all of Pembroke Pines. Francisco Javier Restrepo, 37, of Hollywood; Elias Brand, 31, of Margate; Cristhian Vasquez, 21, of Weston; Sandra Londano, 31, of Miami Beach; and Edgardo Bermudez, 34, of Miami.

One suspect was arrested at South Shore Hospital on Miami Beach.

Still at large is Julio Correa Valdes, 39, of Parkland.