

Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Arkansas

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, February 9, 2023

Fort Smith Arms Dealer Arrested in Austin, Texas

Arrest Ended Six-Day Nationwide Manhunt

FORT SMITH – A Fort Smith man was arrested yesterday in Austin, Texas on criminal charges related to his alleged possession of an unregistered destructive device; namely, an improvised explosive bomb, which was not registered to him in the National Firearms Registration and Transfer Record as required by law. Mehta's arrest ended a six-day manhunt, in which the public's assistance was solicited in locating the defendant, who was assumed to be armed and dangerous.

According to court documents, Neil Ravi Mehta, 31, was found to be in possession of an "improvised explosive bomb" during a federal search warrant executed at his residence on Free Ferry Road, in Fort Smith, Ark. Law enforcement officers located the device in the top left corner of the kitchen island. The device was x-rayed by bomb technicians on-scene, made safe, and the evidence was collected. The following images were taken during the execution of the search warrant:

Mehta is charged in a Criminal Complaint with a single count of Unlawful Possession of an Unregistered Destructive Device. A Grand Jury will later hear evidence related to this investigation and determine whether additional criminal charges will be filed against Mehta. If convicted of the charge of Unlawful Possession of an Unregistered Destructive Device, Mehta faces a maximum penalty of ten years in prison. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

U.S. Attorney David Clay Fowlkes of the Western District of Arkansas made the announcement.

This is a joint investigation involving the following federal law enforcement agencies: the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI); the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF); the U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC), Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS), Office of Export Enforcement (OEE); the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI); and the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of the Inspector General (DOL-OIG).

Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven Mohlhenrich and First Assistant U.S. Attorney Kenneth Elser are prosecuting the case.

A criminal complaint is merely an allegation, and all defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Topic(s):
Firearms Offenses

Component(s):
[USAO - Arkansas, Western](#)