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**NATION**

# Synthetic opioid strong enough to 'kill more than 50M people' seized in California, authorities say

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Published 6:40 p.m. ET Sept. 26, 2021 | Updated 11:17 a.m. ET Sept. 27, 2021

Two Southern California residents were charged in a massive drug bust that resulted in authorities seizing more than 46 pounds of an extremely lethal synthetic opioid.

Andres Jesus Morales, 30, and Christine Ponce, 27, were charged with four felony counts each of possession of a controlled substance for sale, the Riverside District Attorney's Office announced on Thursday.

The two arrests come after the Riverside Police Department raided a home in the city of Perris, California, about 70 miles southeast of Los Angeles, on Aug. 17. At the home, officers seized 46.2 pounds of carfentanil, 8.8 pounds of cocaine and 2.2 pounds of heroin.

No one was at the home at the time, but police said they identified Morales and Ponce as suspects of the case.

Carfentanil is a synthetic opioid that is typically used as a tranquilizing agent for elephants and other large mammals, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration. When administered to humans, the drug is 10,000 times more potent than morphine and 100 times more potent than fentanyl, according to the DEA. The agency also said two milligrams of fentanyl is enough to kill someone.

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"If mixed in with other drugs, the 21 kilos of carfentanil seized could have been enough to potentially kill more than 50 million people," the Riverside District Attorney's Office said in a

statement.

The DEA first issued a public notice about carfentanil in 2016, and then acting Administrator Chuck Rosenberg said, "it is crazy dangerous." In Nov. 2019, New York authorities seized 11 pounds of carfentanil in what was then the largest seizure of it.

Last week's bust is believed to be the single largest seizure of carfentanil in Riverside County history.

The arrests were made after authorities raided another home in the city on Sept. 14, where another 35.2 pounds of cocaine were seized. Morales and Ponce pleaded not guilty to the charges and are being held in prison without bail.

Their next court date is on Nov. 9.

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