



## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Fontana Man Agrees to Plead Guilty to Federal Charges of Pointing Laser Beam at Law Enforcement Helicopter**

*RIVERSIDE, California* – An Inland Empire man is scheduled to be arraigned this afternoon on federal charges of aiming the beam of a laser at an Ontario Police Department helicopter.

Asarel Felix Lombera, 28, who resides in Fontana, but lived in Ontario at the time of the offense, has agreed to plead guilty to the felony offense of aiming a laser at an aircraft. He is scheduled to make his initial appearance this afternoon in United States District Court in Los Angeles.

When Lombera was charged in December, prosecutors also filed a plea agreement in which the defendant admitted that he pointed a laser at the Ontario Police Department helicopter on the evening of February 21, 2015.

The incident occurred as tactical flight officers with the Ontario Police Department were conducting patrol near John Galvin Park, which is just south of Interstate 10 in Ontario. Lombera aimed his \$20 green laser pointer at the OPD helicopter for approximately 15 seconds, tracking the helicopter with the laser and making circles with the beam.

When the laser beam struck the helicopter, it created a prism effect in the cockpit of the helicopter, causing a member of the flight crew to become momentarily dazed and creating a dangerous flight situation.

In his plea agreement, Lombera admitted that he knew that it was dangerous and distracting to shoot the laser at the helicopter.

“As lasers and drones become more affordable and available, members of the public must be extremely conscious of the dangers these technologies pose to aircraft and law enforcement,” said United States Attorney Eileen M. Decker. “In this case, the defendant targeted a helicopter in flight, endangering the flight crew and, potentially, civilians on the ground.”

During today’s arraignment, Lombera’s case will be assigned to a United States District Judge, who will schedule a hearing for Lombera to enter his guilty plea. Once he

pleads guilty, the defendant will face a statutory maximum penalty of five years in federal prison. Lombera will also be subject to potential civil penalties by the Federal Aviation Administration.

"Laser beams are not toys and pointing one at a plane or helicopter in the air is not mischief, but a serious federal crime," said Deirdre Fike, the Assistant Director in Charge of the FBI's Los Angeles Field Office. "The clear skies in southern California generate a significant amount of aircraft flying at any given time and, unfortunately, more illegal laser strikes. The Ontario Police Department should be commended for acting quickly after their pilot was temporarily disabled by the laser beam, and for identifying the perpetrator on the ground."

The investigation in this case was conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Ontario Police Department. The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Joseph B. Widman, Chief of the Riverside Branch Office.

Reports of laser attacks have increased dramatically in recent years, with 1,238 laser strikes reported in California last year, according to the Federal Aviation Administration. In addition, technology has advanced the effectiveness of laser devices, with a resulting increase in the potential safety hazards for aircraft pilots and their passengers. Such safety hazards include temporary distraction and impaired vision, which is particularly dangerous during the critical takeoff or landing phase of flight. In addition, pilots have reported the need to abort landings or relinquish control of the aircraft to another pilot as a result of laser attacks.