

Chula Vista man denies money-laundering charges

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A Chula Vista man accused of working as a front for the Arellano Felix drug cartel pleaded not guilty yesterday to money-laundering charges dating back to the 1990s.

Urbano Hernandez Somero, 63, was arrested Thursday while entering the country at the San Ysidro border crossing.

He has been living legally in the United States for four or five years and has regularly crossed into Tijuana, said his lawyer, Marc Carlos.

"He's a lawyer and businessman in Mexico," Carlos said.

A federal magistrate judge ordered Hernandez held without bail pending a court hearing next week. Prosecutors say he might flee if granted bail.

Hernandez is accused of laundering drug proceeds, along with Manuel Aguirre Galindo, whom the U.S. government considers a senior member of the Tijuana-based cartel.

Aguirre has not been arrested.

An indictment accuses both men of conspiring to illegally move \$842,000 from Mexico into the United States in 12 transactions between 1989 and 1992.

It also accuses the two men of buying a 40-acre parcel in San Ysidro and a bulletproof pickup with drug proceeds.

In September, the Treasury Department accused Hernandez of being the key front man for Aguirre's financial network.

It said Hernandez, through the Oasis Beach Resort and Convention Center in Rosarito Beach, controlled five companies used to launder drug money.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents arrested Hernandez after his name was recently added to a computerized list of people with arrest warrants that border inspectors use.

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