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PRESS RELEASE

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WILLITS DRUG MANUFACTURER SENT TO STATE PRISON

A tenant who caused a drug-related explosion which resulted in a Holly Street rental property being fully engulfed in flames was sentenced Wednesday morning to three years in state prison. David Madrigal, Sr., age 39 of Willits, stands convicted of feloniously and recklessly causing a fire of a structure. Madrigal was ordered to pay fire suppression costs. Final restitution to the landlord and his insurance company was reserved pending a future hearing. After a brief stay to say goodbye to family members, Madrigal was taken into custody Wednesday afternoon to be transported to the reception center at San Quentin to commence serving his commitment.

During the evening hours of March 1, 2014, Willits fire and police personnel responded to a fire on Holly Street. While fire suppression efforts were underway, it was reported to the police that the tenant known to live at the house was seeking medical treatment for burns at Howard Hospital. Initially blaming an unknown stranger he saw in his yard, Madrigal said he could only remember a "huge explosion" and "giant fireball" which he claimed knocked him out. Though claiming to have been knocked out, Madrigal also claimed that he tried to put out the fire, failed in that effort because of its size, and left to walk to the hospital. Responding agents from the Mendocino Major Crimes Task Force determined that a butane honey oil (also known as hash oil) extraction lab had been in operation at the residence. The process used in making BHO (butane honey oil) is extremely dangerous to human life and property, and this lab had exploded causing the fire. After further questioning by the Task Force at the hospital, Madrigal admitted he was operating the BHO lab just prior to the explosion at the same residence where he and his family lived, and that he was selling the finished product in the local community. In his letter to the court, Willits Fire Chief Carl Magann expressed safety concerns. "I believe that anyone who willingly releases butane gas into the tight confines of an enclosed building, complete with an operating heating device, attached to an occupied building, is creating an unjustifiable, objectionable, and substantial risk, especially when that exposure includes children," wrote Magann.

District Attorney David Eyster agrees with Chief Magann and confirmed his no nonsense policy relating to these types of home-made labs. "Mendocino County criminals who put lives and property at risk by manufacturing honey or hash oil will feel the full force of the law if they survive the fairly common explosions," said Eyster. Deputy District Attorney Daniel Madow, the prosecutor who personally handled the prosecution of Madrigal, expressed his appreciation after court to Fire Chief Magann and his Little Lake District firemen for their fast response to hold the fire in check until extinguished. Madow also thanked the Willits Police Department and the Task Force for their investigative work. Under the Realignment laws, Madrigal is eligible to earn up to 50% credit against his 36 month prison commitment. Assuming all credits are earned, it is believed that Madrigal will be paroled from prison back to Mendocino County in approximately March 2016, then to begin a period of formal supervision under the watchful eyes of a local parole agent.