



Riverside County District Attorney  
**NEWS RELEASE**

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**DA'S INVESTIGATORS ARREST TWO MEN IN 2007 MURDER-FOR-HIRE  
OF MAN WHOSE BODY WAS FOUND IN GOOD HOPE**

RIVERSIDE – Early today, July 14, 2010, investigators with the Special Activities Unit of the Riverside County District Attorney's Office arrested the second of two men sought in connection with a 2007 murder-for-hire case connected to the Mexican drug cartel.

"This was a planned vengeance murder that resulted in the death of a victim who was in the wrong place at the wrong time," said Riverside County District Attorney Rod Pacheco. "The extremely violent men involved have now been safely removed from our community due to the hard work of investigators in this office."

Guadalupe Cuevas, DOB: 7-13-73, was arrested by DA's investigators near his home in Wilmington in Los Angeles County about 7:30 this morning.

About 1 a.m. Tuesday, July 13, 2010, Mario Vidal Ponce, DOB: 9-8-68, was arrested outside his Moreno Valley home. Because investigators were aware that Ponce likely had access to numerous weapons and posed a substantial threat to them and the community, a ruse was used to apprehend him. Members of the DA's Special Activities Unit – a specially trained tactical team – had a plainclothes DA's investigator act as though he was being detained by investigators outside Ponce's home for trying to break into a car. When Ponce came outside, he was taken into custody without incident.

Cuevas and Ponce have been charged with conspiracy to commit murder and murder for killing Armando Fierro, whose badly decomposing body was found March 20, 2007, by a woman walking her dog along Christmas Tree Lane in Good Hope. There is also a special circumstance enhancement charged against Ponce and Cuevas which makes them eligible for the death penalty, a determination to be made at a later time by the District Attorney.

The evidence shows that Fierro's brother, Jose, was actually the target of the murder-for-hire plot hatched by Ponce. The murder was to avenge what Ponce believed was Jose Fierro's involvement in a 2005 murder in Van Nuys of one of Ponce's associates who was related to a Mexican drug cartel leader. It is believed that Ponce used Cuevas to coordinate the kidnapping of Jose Fierro and, through Cuevas, Ponce used a third defendant, Saul Santana, to carry out the scheme. Santana, DOB: 2-7-73, of Riverside, was arrested by Riverside County sheriff's investigators in May 2007 and has been charged with murder and kidnapping. Santana is facing the death penalty.

According to the evidence, Santana went to Jose Fierro's home in Colton, in San Bernardino County, on March 5, 2007, to kidnap Jose Fierro, but he was not there. Instead, Santana and at least one unknown person kidnapped Jose's brother, Armando Fierro, while posing as DEA agents. Santana then tried to negotiate with Jose Fierro to meet with him in exchange for his brother's release. When that did not happen, Armando Fierro was shot several times and his body left in Good Hope.

Senior DA Investigator Ed Reed reopened the murder investigation more than a year ago and has been diligently working to gather the evidence needed to charge Ponce and Cuevas.

Reed ultimately was able to connect Jose Fierro to the investigation of the 2005 Van Nuys murder which was a large drug deal gone bad that resulted in the murders of two people.

He also found that Ponce is known to federal authorities as a substantial drug dealer connected with the Mexican drug cartel.

The case against Ponce and Cuevas, SWF10001358, and the Santana case, SWF021363, are being prosecuted by Deputy District Attorney Burke Strunsky.

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