

Calaveras pot robbery becomes a federal case

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The June 24 drug-related armed robbery near Murphys that ended in the death of one of the suspects near Valley Springs has become a federal case.

The Calaveras County District Attorney's Office began the initial prosecution of five defendants in the case, but during the preliminary hearing Monday in Superior Court in San Andreas, federal authorities took over the case to be prosecuted in the federal court system.

A group of men on the afternoon of June 24 allegedly arrived at a location on the 4000 block of French Gulch Road to conclude a previously arranged illegal marijuana transaction, according to initial reports from the Calaveras County Sheriff's Office.

They reportedly were brandishing firearms, made threats, and tied up victims. Several victims were beaten and it was reported the suspects were trying to get information to lead them to additional marijuana sites, more marijuana and more money. The group of men stole personal items from victims as well as marijuana, cash, and one of the victim's vehicles.

A Be On The Lookout bulletin was issued after suspects left the property and a short time later a group of vehicles matching the description were seen traveling westbound on State Route 12 just outside Valley Springs.

A high-speed chase ensued and one of the suspects, later identified as Denter Maurice Essex, 28, of Chicago, Ill., jumped out of a vehicle and died from his injuries.

The vehicle he was in crashed and four suspects were quickly arrested at the scene. Two others who evaded law enforcement in another vehicle were arrested later.

The six defendants are Mark Rodney Noble, 32, Lincolnwood, Ill.; Dontia S. Arrington, 38, of Skokie, Ill.; Jim Khio, 31, of Morton Grove, Ill.; Talia Khio, 41, of Roseville; Roddy Aundre Johnson Jr., 29, of San Diego and Carlos Oshan Merkhai, 31, from Arizona.

The suspects from Illinois have been identified as documented gang members belonging to the Black P Stones and Latin Kings criminal street gangs.