

US pharma bosses charged with fueling opioid crisis

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Two former executives of a major US pharmaceutical company were charged Tuesday with fulfilling orders they knew to be fraudulent during the opioid epidemic that has claimed tens of thousands of lives.

It was the first time that senior or former executives have faced [criminal](#)

[charges](#) in connection with distributing powerful prescription painkillers like oxycodone and fentanyl that carry a high risk of addiction and overdose.

The company where the executives worked, Rochester Drug Cooperative (RDC), is one of the country's largest distributors of prescription opioids.

It has entered into a non-prosecution agreement with the US Attorney's office in New York and agreed to pay a \$20 million fine.

As result, the company will not be prosecuted and will be allowed to retain its license to distribute drugs, while promising to reform its practices.

In a statement, RDC admitted that between 2012 and 2017 it had failed to report shipments of drugs it recognized as suspicious, as required by law.

"This prosecution is the first of its kind," US Attorney Geoffrey Berman said in a statement.

"Executives of a pharmaceutical distributor and the distributor itself have been charged with [drug trafficking](#), trafficking the same drugs that are fueling the [opioid epidemic](#) that is ravaging this country."

RDC distributes to some 1,300 pharmacies and with an annual turnover of more than \$1 billion, according to documents released by prosecutors.

Investigators found that it had failed to report at least 2,000 suspicious orders of drugs whose distribution is overseen by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA).

The defendants were named as former CEO Laurence Doud, 75, and William Pietruszewski, 53, who had served as chief compliance officer.

"RDC's employees, including in conversations with Doud and Pietruszewski, described some of the company's customers as 'very suspicious,' and even characterized particular pharmacies as a 'DEA investigation in the making' or 'like a stick of dynamite waiting for (the) DEA to light the fuse,'" the New York prosecutors said.

"Nonetheless, throughout the period in question, RDC, at the direction of Doud, increased its sales of oxycodone and fentanyl exponentially," the statement added.

Doud and Pietruszewski were charged with conspiracy to distribute controlled substances, which carries a maximum sentence of life in prison and a minimum of 10 years.

Doud was arrested Tuesday and appeared before a federal judge, who ordered his release on a \$500,000 bond.

Pietruszewski pleaded guilty to the same two counts, as well as breaches of his duty to report to the authorities.

Around 47,600 people died in 2017 from an opiate overdose in the United States, according Centers for Disease Control and Prevention figures.

"This epidemic has been driven by greed," Berman told a news conference, adding that Doud had seen his salary more than double between 2012 and 2016.

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