

# DISTRICT ATTORNEY

DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
Larry D. Morse II

CHIEF DEPUTY  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
Harold L. Nutt



ASSISTANT  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
Joseph M. Tresidder

CHIEF DEPUTY  
DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
Mark V. Bacciarini

2222 "M" STREET, MERCED, CA 95340  
TELEPHONE (209) 385-7381  
FAX (209) 725-3669

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May 22, 2009

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **CHILD MOLESTER ENTERS PLEA**

On Wednesday, Dos Palos resident Antonio Smith entered no contest pleas to two counts of Lewd acts on a child under the age of 14. The 41 year old Smith also admitted to Merced County Superior Court Judge Carol Ash that he suffered a prior "strike" conviction stemming from similar conduct in 1990. Both of the new convictions are also "strikes under the "Three Strikes You're Out" law. Following the plea, Judge Ash sentenced Smith to 16 years in State Prison.

The convictions stem from an investigation by the Dos Palos Police Department, which learned of the molestations when Officers found a 16 year old girl intoxicated at defendant's residence. Following up on a tip received during that investigation, police learned that Smith had been having sexual contact with other underage girls, with the victim in this case being age 12. When the victim was interviewed, she detailed the sexual abuse she suffered at the hand of the defendant.

Deputy District Attorney Robert Carroll, who prosecuted the case, noted that the defendant's victims have been severely traumatized by Smith's crimes. "I want to thank the victims for their courage throughout this ordeal. These crimes involve children and make the reporting and prosecution traumatic," Carroll said. "Child victims are the most vulnerable members of our society. We as a community are obligated to protect them as best we can," Carroll added. Carroll also praised the Dos Palos Police Department for its investigation and commitment to the community. "The Department did an outstanding job investigation these crimes and showed obvious commitment to keeping Dos Palos safe and secure," said Carroll. Carroll also noted that the plea agreement reached in this case was made in part to protect these fragile victims from further suffering.

Because the offenses Smith was convicted of are violent felonies, Smith will be required to serve 85% of his sentence before he is eligible for parole. Additionally, Smith will be subject to an evaluation by prison officials to determine if he is a Sexually Violent Predator (SVP). If he is found to be a continued danger, he faces a potential lifetime civil commitment in a State Hospital.