

# Convicted drug dealer loses appeal based on inability to question dead man

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GREEN BAY – The inability of a convicted drug ring leader to question a dead man is no reason to overturn his conviction, an appellate court ruled recently.

Billy Yang, 39, pleaded no contest in Brown County Circuit Court in November 2017 to 22 felonies related to a drug-trafficking case in which drug agents seized nearly \$90,000 worth of methamphetamine and other street drugs and made more than 40 arrests.

Yang, whom investigators named as the head of the drug operation, was charged with 51 offenses, including drug and weapons offenses, but pleaded to a reduced number. Brown County Circuit Judge John Zakowski sentenced Yang to 22 years in prison.

Investigators never revealed much about the cases, and charges in most of them remain sealed to protect the identity of confidential informants who helped solve the case.

One of those informants was Jeffrey Tarkowski, 44, of Green Bay, who faced minor charges in connection with the drug operation.

Tarkowski allegedly provided some kind of statement to investigators, but died on March 9, 2017, while Yang's case was still pending. The cause of Tarkowski's death has not been made public.

Yang claimed in his appeal that Tarkowski's death prevented him from being able to exercise his constitutional right to confront him as an accuser.

The Court of Appeals rejected the argument in part because Yang failed to indicate what Tarkowski's statements were, but also because Yang had pleaded no contest to his charges, thereby forfeiting his right to make the claim.

Yang appealed on additional grounds. He claimed his rights were violated when investigators working with a local car dealership and repair shop were given permission, when Yang's car was being repaired, to have access to the vehicle to install a GPS



Yang

monitor.

Investigators also persuaded the garage staff to separate Yang's money when he paid for the repair job, so they could examine it, Yang said in his appeal. Investigators found some of the marked bills with which uncover agents had bought drugs from Yang, court documents say.

The Court of Appeals rejected Yang's claims, saying the garage was under no obligation to protect Yang's privacy.

Yang and others connected to the drug ring came at the end of an investigation that lasted more than seven months, involved 25 controlled drug buys, eight confidential informants and 20 search warrants, all executed on a single morning in March 2016.

Arrests were made in raids conducted in Brown, Oconto and Kewaunee counties. Investigators at the time called it the largest dismantling of a drug trafficking operation by local law enforcement.

Police seized almost two pounds of methamphetamine, more than 18 pounds of marijuana and smaller amounts of other drugs. They said the methamphetamine was manufactured in Mexico and delivered to Yang's organization by drug rings in Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Police had Yang and another man under surveillance at a storage unit Yang was renting on Velp Avenue that day in March. Police saw them handling a gun and going through a red suitcase that investigators knew contained drugs and weapons.

They arrested the two as they headed to Yang's car. A search of the two men, the car and the storage shed turned up \$12,597 in cash, 50.24 grams of meth, 623 grams of marijuana, three handguns, three cellphones, three scales, baggies, meth pipes and ammunition, court records say.

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