

JEFFREY S. ROSELL
DISTRICT ATTORNEY



**OFFICE OF
THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ**

Santa Cruz
701 Ocean Street, Room 200
Santa Cruz, CA 95060
(831) 454-2400
dao@co.santa-cruz.ca.us

Website

<http://datinternet.co.santa-cruz.ca.us/>

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Contact: Charlie Baum - (831) 454-2400

Pedro Zuniga-Garcia Sentenced to 29 years for Gang-Related Violent Crime

District Attorney Jeff Rosell announced today that Pedro “Termite” Zuniga-Garcia, a hardcore gang member from Watsonville, was sentenced to 29 years and 4 months in prison for his role in a series of crimes that occurred in 2008 and 2009. The defendant fled to Mexico in 2009, but was then apprehended when he returned to Watsonville in 2014. In June 2015 he was tried and convicted of nine charges, including three counts of assault with a deadly weapon, three counts of active participation in a criminal street gang, two counts of resisting peace officers, and one count of attempted destruction of evidence.

The charges stem from three different incidents. In March 2008, the defendant was present when a fight broke out at a party. When the homeowner tried to break up the fight, Zuniga-Garcia and two other gang members brutally beat him using a 2x4 piece of wood. The three gang members then turned on another partygoer and assaulted him, causing severe head trauma. The victims have since recovered, but still have scars from their injuries.

In April 2008, while the defendant was in custody, he got into a physical fight with staff from the Santa Cruz County Jail after they discovered gang messages hidden in his cell. He and his cell mate both fought with the guards in an effort to flush the incriminating messages down the toilet, but the messages were recovered and introduced during his prosecution.

Following these two incidents, the defendant’s bail was significantly reduced by the court over the District Attorney’s objections. While out on reduced bail, the defendant chased down and stabbed a rival gang member in Watsonville in February 2009. The rival gang member sustained a stab wound to his back, but recovered. When the defendant was arraigned on that charge, the District Attorney’s Office requested that bail be returned to the original amount, but the request was denied. The defendant then fled to Mexico. He returned sometime in 2014, and was finally re-arrested by the Watsonville Police Department.

At sentencing today, Zuniga-Garcia addressed the court and broke down in tears. Assistant District Attorney Charles Baum said, “This defendant has a long record of violent crime as a well-known and dangerous gang member. We are relieved he is off the streets.” ADA Baum acknowledged the hard work and persistence of law enforcement officers of the Santa Cruz Sheriff’s Office, the Watsonville Police Department, and Inspector Morgan Chappell of the District Attorney’s Office. District Attorney Jeff Rosell said, “This sentence brings closure to a string of crimes that endangered our community and highlights this office’s commitment to public safety.”