

Tick-Talks case

warrant issued

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A Dade Circuit judge Tuesday issued a warrant for the arrest of Rafael Villaverde, a controversial anti-Castro activist and defendant in the state's Operation Tick-Talks drug case, even though Villaverde's whereabouts are unknown and he may have been lost at sea.

Judge Gerald Kogan issued the warrant after prosecutors told him of the mysterious circumstances surrounding Villaverde's absence. The former director of the Little Havana Activities Center was allegedly on a boating trip near the Northwest Berry Islands in the Bahamas last Wednesday when the boat on which he was traveling caught fire.

Other survivors, which included codefendants in the Tick-Talks case, said Villaverde, badly burned, jumped into the water and they threw him a line but couldn't save him. Coast Guard search parties were unable to find any trace of Villaverde.

Villaverde, who faced a single count of conspiracy to traffic in narcotics stemming from the Tick-Talks probe, was free on a \$10,000 bond. Kogan gave the bondsman 90 days to determine whether Villaverde actually is dead before seizing the bond.