



News Release

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Border contraband seizures soar as DHS, ATF hold summit in San Diego

Feds credit heightened enforcement, cooperation for overall rise in seizures worldwide

SAN DIEGO – High-level representatives from three of the federal agencies responsible for combating contraband trafficking along the southern border announced Tuesday that seizures involving illegal drugs, weapons and illicit cash worldwide rose significantly in the latter half of fiscal year 2009, an increase they attribute to stepped up enforcement efforts and increased cooperation.

Statistics show that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers assigned to the southern border seized more than \$40 million in illicit cash from mid-March through the end of September, nearly double the amount intercepted during the same period in fiscal year 2008. The bulk of those seizures involved cash that was ultimately destined for Mexico.

For its part, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), under Project Gunrunner, has focused its efforts on dismantling the firearms trafficking organizations responsible for the violence and movement of hundreds of firearms along the border and into Mexico. From July through September 2009, ATF seizures of illegal firearms along the border increased by more than 65 percent compared to the three previous months. Similarly, weapons seizures by ICE and CBP officers in the border region are also up. In the last six months of fiscal year 2009, ICE and CBP officers recovered nearly 600 illegal weapons, up more than 50 percent compared to the last six months of fiscal year 2008.

Many of those seizures involved agents and officers assigned to the 10 ICE-led Border Enforcement Security Task Forces (BEST) located along the southwest border. The agencies participating in the BESTs, including ATF and CBP, work together to address cross-border crime. The BESTs have been instrumental in the success of Operation Armas Cruzadas, an ongoing initiative involving ICE and CBP to target the smuggling of weapons from the United States into Mexico.

ICE, CBP and ATF released the statistics as representatives from the three agencies met in San Diego to develop new initiatives to target cross border crime and weapons trafficking. The

agency leaders say the latest seizure data show that expanded joint enforcement efforts along the southern border are having a significant impact.

“Today’s criminal organizations respect no borders and know no boundaries,” said Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for ICE John Morton. “If we’re going to successfully address this challenge, we must work together to harness all of the resources, expertise, and legal authorities at our disposal. The goal of this summit is to gauge what has worked well so far in this effort and develop new, more far-reaching strategies to address these threats.”

Participants in the two-day summit include ICE, CBP and ATF personnel from the agencies’ key offices throughout the Southwest. The summit comes just two months after top-level representatives from the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice, along with officials from Mexico, signed a Letter of Intent, pledging to develop a coordinated, intelligence-driven response to address cross border smuggling and weapons trafficking. The San Diego summit is designed to build on that framework, with agency leaders and line agents working together to develop joint initiatives to attack the criminal organizations.

“The violent crime issues along our border have far reaching implications across our nation,” said ATF Acting Director Kenneth Melson. “Intelligence reports verify that the Mexican cartel activity, both drug trafficking and firearms-related violence, has affected well over 200 cities in the United States. Through this and other conferences, federal law enforcement agencies and our state and local partners are preparing strategic, coordinated responses to protect citizens on both sides of the border.”

“We have made tremendous strides in our efforts to stem the flow of currency and firearms to drug trafficking organizations in Mexico, and we will continue to build on these successes in the coming year,” said the Chief of the United States Border Patrol David Aguilar. “Partnerships, both domestically and with our neighbors to the south, are crucial. We cannot work alone and must continue to share information, leverage the latest intelligence, pool our resources and ideas, and continue to find innovative ways to protect our borders and confront these violent criminal organizations. The tens of millions of dollars intercepted, as well as the record-breaking amount of narcotics seized borderwide, is a testament to our continued vigilance and success in supporting our Mexican partners to address this mutual threat.”

Since Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano announced in March that DHS was intensifying efforts to combat cross border violence and weapons trafficking, both CBP and ICE have moved quickly to respond. For its part, ICE has deployed 110 additional agents to its BEST units along the southwest border and in Mexico. ICE has also established a Vetted Arms Trafficking Unit in Mexico City to target transnational smuggling and firearms trafficking organizations in Mexico. CBP has dedicated personnel assigned to the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) supporting investigatory and interdiction efforts of multiple member agencies. CBP has increased enforcement efforts by utilizing CBP officers and Border Patrol agents to conduct augmented pulse and surge outbound operations along the southwest border.

ATF is the federal law enforcement agency responsible for enforcing federal firearms and explosives laws, and has the sole authority to regulate and inspect those two industries. ICE is the federal agency responsible for the enforcement of import, export and immigration laws. By

working jointly to exercise these unique enforcement authorities, the two agencies are well-equipped to investigate gun law violations as they pertain to international firearms trafficking.

The San Diego summit is slated to wrap up late Wednesday afternoon.

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