



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

News Releases

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ICE launches task force to combat cross-border crime in Southern California

EL CENTRO, Calif. - As part of its ongoing effort to combat cross-border crime and violence, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) is launching a Border Enforcement Security Task Force (BEST) in the Imperial Valley to target the criminal organizations and illegal activity that threaten the safety of residents on both sides of the border.

The ICE-led task force will be made up of officers from federal, state, local and foreign law enforcement agencies, including U.S. Customs and Border Protection - Border Patrol, the Drug Enforcement Administration, the FBI, the Bureau of Land Management and the Mexican law enforcement agency Secretaria de Seguridad Publica.

The Imperial Valley BEST, the 10th BEST group in the nation, will focus on combating the illegal movement of drugs, people and weapons across the border. The Task Force will also seek to identify cross-border tunnels and other potential safety and security risks. The BEST will be involved in all aspects of the enforcement process, from interdiction to prosecution. Ultimately, the group's goal is to attack and dismantle the criminal organizations involved in cross-border illegal activity, such as narcotics and arms trafficking. In addition, the Task Force will target the violent gangs that pose a continuing threat to residents and law enforcement officers along the border in both the United States and Mexico.

"Cross-border crime is a serious threat to the safety and security of the American public," said Miguel Unzueta, special agent in charge for the ICE office of investigations in San Diego. "The success of the other BEST teams operating along our borders shows the value of joint enforcement efforts based upon shared intelligence, creative partnerships and strategic thinking."

In addition to the Imperial Valley, the other BESTs are located in Laredo, El Paso, and Harlingen, Texas; Tucson, Yuma, and Phoenix, Ariz.; Blaine, Wash.; Buffalo, N.Y.; and San Diego, Calif..

In fiscal year 2007, the BESTs nationwide were responsible for more than 500 criminal arrests and nearly 300 criminal indictments, as well as the seizure of more than 2,000 pounds of cocaine, 50,000 pounds of marijuana, 2,300 weapons and nearly \$3 million in U.S. currency.

The involvement of Mexican law enforcement in the BESTs has aided in the successful return of criminal fugitives sought in both countries, including the removal to Mexico of one of that nation's most wanted fugitives. BEST arms smuggling investigations have led to numerous

arrests and the seizure of thousands of rounds of ammunition and firearms, including a cache of AK-47 assault rifles destined for Mexico.

-- ICE --

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.

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