



# Stop Border Deaths Now!

A project of the Border Working Group

**Attn: Immigration Policy Aide**

July 19, 2005

The US border with Mexico is often seen as a microcosm of the national debate around immigration reform. Recently, the border has begun to creep north. Many of the policies enacted there are models for enforcement policies that are later carried out at a national level. Many of these policies raise serious civil rights concerns, and the larger question – if we don't approve of them nationwide, why should we tolerate them in our border communities?

In the summer of 2004, panic ravaged Southern California. Over the course of two days, more than 100 people were rounded up and detained, many of them deported. From mid-March to August, over 11,000 were interrogated by Border Patrol officials, 640 of whom were detained (470 from one city). The operation was ordered, in part, by the Border Patrol's San Diego Sector. Amid outcry from the public and members of Congress, the Undersecretary of the Department of Homeland Security announced that the operation had been ordered without approval from national headquarters. No disciplinary actions were taken.

Initial confusion about which agency was conducting the raids—Border Patrol or Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)—illustrates the cloudy nature of border enforcement and immigration enforcement in general. Statements were made that the California operation involved investigation into workplace violations, normally considered “interior” enforcement, and carried out by ICE. Areas that were affected by the summer 2004 operation stretched up to 90 miles away from the U.S.-Mexico border. Upon questioning, Border Patrol spokespersons stated that their agents can go anywhere in the U.S. to investigate an immigration matter. More recently, Border Patrol agents have been surveilling highways and communities in northern New Mexico, as far north as Santa Fe, which is over 400 miles north of the border.

The border is a testing ground for immigration policies, and civil and human rights are affected on a daily basis. The border continues to be a region where individuals can be asked at any moment about their legal status simply because they are at the border. Most often, these stops are targeted at people of Hispanic origin. A recent study by the American Friends Service Committee cites Border patrol detentions of individuals using public transportation in the San Diego area. Of over 11,000 detentions, less than 1% of people stopped were not of Latino background. Furthermore, these stops yielded arrests in only 5.9% of cases – hardly a successful result for such labor intensive work. These attitudes are beginning to extend nationwide, and initiatives such as Operation TARMAC and workplace sanctions turn each workplace into mini-borders, where any individual can be asked for immigration status.

Similar concerns are raised about the recent implementation of the REAL ID act, and its provisions on drivers licenses and infrastructure construction. With new identification requirements for drivers licenses, there are concerns that the border experience of detentions prefaced by asking for identification as proof of citizenship could be spread nationwide, effectively making drivers licenses a form of national identification card.

Infrastructure construction at the border raises similar concerns. REAL ID provisions that allow for the waiver of non-constitutional rights to expedite construction of fencing and even roads at the border, if successful, could expand to other parts of the nation where enforcement trumps civil rights.

The border and the policies that affect the region should be a concern for policy makers interested in immigration reform because policies at the border are indicators of immigration enforcement practices to come for the rest of the nation. Above all, border issues are important for the simple fact that we cannot condone government policies that directly or indirectly lead to civil and human rights abuses.

-over -

For more information, contact Sean Garcia at 202.546.7010 or [sgarcia@lawg.org](mailto:sgarcia@lawg.org)

*In the first two weeks of July, 77 people died trying to enter the United States. 40 of these deaths occurred in Arizona, while 31 took place in Texas. Below are a few of the victims' stories.*

**July 2:** A man is found barely alive in the desert south of Three Points, Arizona. Rescue agents perform CPR for three hours, but to no avail.

**July 2:** A woman is discovered south of Vamori on the Tohono O'odham Nation south of Sells, Arizona. She slips into convulsions and is brought to the Tucson Medical Center, where she later dies.

**July 2:** During the night, agents find an unidentified dead body in Comobabi on the Tohono O'odham nation in Arizona.

**July 4:** A woman dies from heat exhaustion in Ak Chin, southwest of Tucson, Arizona.

**July 4:** A Border Patrol pilot spots two bodies west of Ajo, Arizona. The bodies were so badly decomposed that officials were unable to identify their sex.

**July 4:** Carlos Armando Ortiz Dominguez, 25, from Ures, a small town near Hermosillo, Sonora, is found dead from heat exposure close to Geronimo Trail Road east of Douglas, Arizona. He was traveling across the border with neighbors, who left him when he began trembling and fell ill. His family and Border Patrol agents retraced the groups' steps which finally led them to his decomposed corpse.

**July 4:** In the afternoon, Santa Cruz County deputies find a dead unidentified body near Ruby Road in Santa Cruz County, just north of Nogales, Arizona.

**July 5:** Nineteen-year-old Virginia Lizbeth Mejia Mejia is found dead in Bisbee Junction, two miles east of Naco, Arizona. Her brother-in-law was with her when she collapsed and went to find Border Patrol for help. She is from Atlautla, Mexico.

**July 6:** Two migrants surrender to Yuma Border Patrol and lead them to the unidentified man who had died on their journey. He was found near Tacna, east of Yuma, Arizona.

**July 7:** The body of an unidentified man is found dead three miles north of Three Points, Arizona.

**July 7:** A man traveling in a large group falls ill from heat exhaustion and goes into convulsions five miles west of Sells, Arizona. Another man, also abandoned by the group went to find help, but it was too late.

**July 7:** A Bureau of Customs and Border Protection pilot spots a dead woman near Federal Route 31 at milepost 9 near Cowlick, Arizona. She appeared to have died from heat related injuries several days earlier.

**July 7:** An Arivaca resident finds an unidentified dead body near milepost 3 on Arivaca Road in Pima County, Arizona.

**July 7:** A man in his mid to late 40s is found in the Rio Grande at the 6300 block of Doniphan in El Paso, Texas. Employees of the El Paso County Water Improvement District found the floating body at 8:30 in the morning.

**July 7:** Eight miles northwest of Three Points, southwest of Tucson, Arizona, a man between the ages of 20 and 40 is spotted by an Air National Guard helicopter pilot. Exposure to the elements is the cause of death.