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Frequently Asked Questions

(11/13/2009)



Q: Where is the Border Patrol located? I see Border Patrol agents throughout San Diego County, where are they stationed?

A: The San Diego Sector encompasses 66 miles of international border and over 7,000 square miles of total terrain. The San Diego Sector begins at the international border with Mexico and stretches to the Orange County line, the Riverside County line, and the Imperial County line. The San Diego Sector is comprised of seven individual Border Patrol stations and two substations. The Border Patrol stations are situated throughout San Diego County. Each station is responsible for a geographical area.

Q: What laws do Border Patrol agents enforce? What is the Border Patrol's authority?

A: The United States Border Patrol is the mobile uniformed enforcement arm of U.S. Customs and Border Protection. The San Diego Sector mission is to maintain control of the international boundaries between ports of entry by detecting and preventing the smuggling and unlawful entry of illegal aliens into the United States. As part of its mission, the Border Patrol also interdicts narcotics and other illegal contraband.

Q: How do I contact the Border Patrol? How do I report illegal activity / immigration violations / suspected illegal smuggling activity?

A: You can report suspected illegal activity by contacting the San Diego Sector Communication Center at **(619) 498-9900**.

Q: What is an illegal alien?

A: An "illegal alien," sometimes referred to as an undocumented migrant, is an individual who has entered the United States without proper documentation or permission. Additionally, an individual who has entered the United States legally, i.e. as a visitor, but who violates his / her immigration status becomes an illegal alien and is subject to removal from the United States.

Q: What happens to a person arrested by the Border Patrol?

A: San Diego Sector Border Patrol agents arrested over 182,000 illegal aliens in fiscal year 1999. Though the number seems staggering, the volume of apprehensions has decreased dramatically since the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper. Individuals arrested by the Border Patrol are predominately illegal aliens, though it is not uncommon for a United States citizen or legal resident to be arrested for committing immigration violations. Illegal aliens are afforded two essential legal rights: a voluntary return to their host country or a removal hearing.

The voluntary return allows the non-criminal illegal alien to return to his / her host county without being prosecuted. A removal hearing is a formal immigration hearing in which the illegal alien seeks relief through the courts.

When an alien with a criminal record is arrested, he / she is processed for criminal prosecution. The criminal alien is tried in federal court and may be subsequently formally removed from the United States.

Q: How do I find someone in the custody of the Border Patrol?

A: Border Patrol stations are equipped for short-term detention. Illegal aliens are normally detained for brief periods of time, usually less than four hours, and then either voluntarily returned to their country or, in the case of an illegal alien with a criminal record or an illegal alien requesting a removal hearing, transferred to an U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Service Center.

Q: Does the Border Patrol operate at the ports of entry?

A: No. Border Patrol agents operate between the ports of entry. In essence, Border Patrol agents patrol the unregulated area of access to the United States. Border Patrol agents are responsible for deterring, interdicting, and stopping the flow of illegal aliens between the ports of entry.

Q: What is Operation Gatekeeper?

A: On October 1, 1994, a bold and far-reaching initiative to restore integrity and safety to the nation's busiest border was launched. Called Operation Gatekeeper, the former Immigration and Naturalization Service, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of California, and the Executive Officer for Immigration Review committed unprecedented resources and implemented innovative strategies to reverse decades of neglect along the San Diego border.

Operation Gatekeeper's ambitious goal was and remains to reduce illegal immigration across the San Diego border by providing Border Patrol agents with the tools they need in order to do the job. Federal agencies, working together, set out to strategically deploy new personnel, equipment, technology and tactics across the nation's most vulnerable border region.

Now, 10 years later, Operation Gatekeeper's achievements are clear. New resources have deterred and shifted illegal alien traffic, the border enforcement strategy has disrupted smuggling operations, and record numbers of illegal crossers and smugglers are being prosecuted.

Q: How does the Border Patrol patrol the border?

A: Border Patrol agents patrol the border on foot, on horseback and in vehicles and aircraft suitable for the terrain and patrol area. The most common forms of transportation used by agents are four wheel drive vehicles, police sedans, and vans. In addition to these forms of transportation, agents use ATVs, mountain bikes and boats to patrol along the border areas.

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