

Texas A&M
The Battalion

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Florida drug smugglers reroute to Texas ports

United Press International
BROWNSVILLE — Marijuana seizures in Brownsville have increased fourfold over previous years, partially as a consequence of the much-publicized Florida drug crackdown which is forcing smugglers to reroute their contraband through South Texas.

Local Drug Enforcement Administration officials say, however, local citizens need not despair. DEA officials said a Gulf Coast task force similar to the one in Florida is being organized and should be operating by the end of the month. It will include the Valley in its surveillance.

The dramatic increase in local marijuana traffic mirrors trends from areas such as Houston, where U.S. Customs officials recently reported their seizures had tripled — a phenomenon they also attributed to the activities of the Florida task force.

Marijuana is seasonal, with the peak traffic generally occurring in the last quarter of each year, said James Pullen, Brownsville DEA special agent in charge.

Between October and December of 1981, the Brownsville DEA office dealt with 1,604 pounds of marijuana which was seized by federal and local authorities. In the same period of 1982, 605 pounds was confiscated — a fourfold increase.

McAllen DEA officials also said there had been large increases there in recent months.

Cocaine traffic also increased dramatically. Between July and December of 1982, local seizures in which the Brownsville DEA was involved amounted to 7 pounds of cocaine, as compared to only a few ounces during the same period of 1981.

"Part of the reason for the overall increase in traffic is the Florida task force," Pullen said. "The economic problems in Mexico are also responsible for some of this traffic. After all, marijuana smuggling is a money-making operation."

The Florida task force was organized by President Reagan as part of his campaign against illegal drugs. Comprised of officers from different federal agencies, the task force began its work in March of last year, waging what can only be termed an all-out war on drug smugglers.

"The Navy flies surveillance airplanes around the clock, searching for unauthorized aircraft," said Brent Eaton, Miami DEA special agent assigned to the Florida task force.

"The Air Force monitors the skies using its sophisticated Norad radar system.

The Army provides us with any additional equipment we may need including helicopters. The Coast Guard, of course, patrols the seas continuously for suspicious-looking vessels."

Civilian agencies working with the task force include the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, U.S. Customs, U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Federal Bureau of Investigation and even the U.S. Treasury, Eaton said.

Besides stemming the flow by catching smugglers with the goods, the task force is exploring other methods of curbing contraband. Operation Greenback, an investigative force headed up by the Internal Revenue Service and U.S. Customs, has been probing into money-laundering schemes, for example.

"Their investigations sometimes help us trace the money back to the drugs and make our work easier," Eaton said. If the task force is unable to catch some of these smugglers with drugs, the IRS can sometimes put them out of circulation by compiling cases against them based on their finances.

The task force has proved so effective that the federal government is planning to assemble 12 other such forces to be deployed throughout the country.

Border economy improving

United Press International
EL PASO — Industrialists from throughout the United States are expressing great interest in following the example of other firms who have established "twin" offices in Mexico and along the American side of the border.

The devaluations of Mexico's peso have provided the impetus for companies flooding the Chamber of Commerce with inquiries about establishing assembly plants across the border in Juarez, Mexico.

An El Paso chamber spokesman said this week American border cities profit from the Mexican plants because the firms usually establish an administrative office on the U.S. side, increasing transportation and other services.

Among the enticements for the "maquiladoras," or assembly plants, is the fact the average Mexican factory wage, including fringe benefits, is less than 94 cents an hour.

Cities all along the border are enticing industrialists to establish the plants, arguing that a Mexican twin plant will keep an American industrialist competi-

tive with Japanese and Asian firms.

In El Paso and other American border cities the companies are called "twin plants" because they usually are connected with a companion firm in the United States.

Under the twin-plant idea, the American manufacturer exports components to the Mexican plant for assembly, then brings the completed components back across the border for sale in the United States.

U.S. tariff guidelines allow American industrialists to bring the processed or assembled products back dutyfree, except for the value added by processing in Mexico.

Mexico initiated the program in 1965 as a means of providing jobs and improving the border economy.

More than 45,000 workers are employed in 124 of the "twin plants" in Juarez, Mexico, across the border from El Paso. The second largest number of employees is in Tijuana, Mexico, across the border from San Diego. There are 143 plants in Tijuana, mostly small firms employing a total of about 15,000

people, according to the latest chamber reports.

The program is not without its detractors. Labor unions argue the twin plants are unfair competition, creating a loss of jobs in the United States.

William Mitchell, marketing director for a group of the twin plants in Juarez, said rather than create a loss of jobs, the twin plants "are keeping many American companies in business."

"Twin plants protect jobs in

the United States," he said. "If an American firm can't compete successfully with a Hong Kong operation, it would be forced out of business and many more jobs would be lost in the States."

There are 59 twin plants employing 21,734 people in Nogales, Sonora, across the border from Nogales, Ariz. Matamoros, across from Brownsville, Texas, has 45 plants and 15,238 employees.

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