

Border patrol forms wall to stop illegal immigration

The Associated Press

EL PASO — The U.S. Border Patrol's second-largest sector was optimistic Monday after tasting initial success with its most aggressive effort ever to stop illegal immigrants from crossing the Rio Grande.

The agency put up a 20-mile wall of agents along the river starting at midnight Sunday and recorded a dramatic decrease in the number of illegal border-

crossers arrested.

Agents arrested 158 Sunday, compared to an average of about 500 to 1,000. There is no way of determining how many people decided not to cross.

"So far, the operation has been a tremendous success," said Chief Agent Sylvestre Reyes of the El Paso sector, which boasts about 625 agents and covers 125,000 square miles in West Texas and New Mexico.

"Operation Blockade" uses 400 agents for a 24-hour high-profile vigil

from Sunland Park, N.M., just outside El Paso's western boundary to the community of Ysleta on El Paso's eastern outskirts.

The operation will continue indefinitely while the agency evaluates the effectiveness of the sector's unprecedented show of force, said Reyes.

The Border Patrol generally concentrates on apprehending illegal immigrants after they have crossed over, rather than stopping them at the river.

"We're not concerned with catching

1,000 or 10,000 aliens a day," Reyes said. "We are concerned with discouraging them."

Reyes said he decided to try the blockade after members of the community expressed concern over high border crimes rates and the sheer numbers of illegal border crossers.

The crackdown also comes at a time when illegal immigration has drawn the attention of leaders across the nation, including President Clinton, who has called for taking control of the border.

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