

Growth industry



ANTHONY DISALVO/The Battalion

Senior agriculture major **Walt Rakowitz** builds a crop-height sensor Monday as part of a new Department of Agricultural Engineering project. The sensor uses infrared sensors to measure plant height.

U.S., Cuba hold narcotics talks

WASHINGTON (AP) — Amid protests from Cuban-American lawmakers, four U.S. officials met yesterday in Havana with Cuban officials to discuss ways of improving counter-narcotics cooperation, a State Department official said.

Meetings between U.S. and Cuban officials on issues other than migration are rare but not unprecedented. "This is not a change in U.S. policy," Michael Ranneberger, head of the State Department's office of Cuban affairs, said. He said the meeting was within guidelines for law-enforcement efforts on counter-narcotics.

The U.S. team consisted of two State Department and two Coast Guard officials who spent one day in Cuba.

Monday's meeting was aimed at elevating communications on counter-narcotics issues from an existing telex link to a phone link and other means, an official said, adding that the U.S. team had no plans to offer assistance to Cuba, to share intelligence or to discuss joint operations.

U.S. counter-drug specialists have become increasingly concerned about South American traffickers' use of Cuban waters and air space to transport drugs to the United States, and the law enforcement community requested a team be sent, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Fla., objected to the decision, saying it was ridiculous for the administration to give Cuban President Fidel Castro credibility on the drug issue. She said Castro is notorious for helping drug traffickers. Similar objections were voiced by Rep. Lincoln

Diaz-Balart who, like Ros-Lehtinen, is a born South Florida Republican.

In a telephone interview, Diaz-Balart said a grand jury in U.S. District Court in Miami prepared an indictment against the Castro government concerning cocaine that entered the United States in 1993 despite "massive" evidence of involvement with drug kingpins, he said.

But Barry McCaffrey, the White House control policy chief, said last month has shown a willingness to help the United States fight international drug trade.

Only a small portion of the drug trade in the United States come through Cuba, said, adding that the island's large growing tourist market could make it a target for drug traffickers.



CASTRO

Railway killer charged in 2 deaths

MURPHYSBORO, Ill. (AP) — An alleged serial killer who is apparently making his way from town to town by hopping freight trains was charged yesterday with murdering a father and daughter in Illinois, bringing to eight the number of slayings he is linked to.

Rafael Resendez-Ramirez, 39, was also put on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted list Monday. He is wanted for questioning in five killings in Texas and one in Kentucky since August 1997.

"All I do know is that if this person is the person we suspect in these crimes, it's a very dangerous and violent person," said Don K. Clark, the agent in charge of the nationwide task force searching for the suspect. The task force has more than 200 investigators working the case.

Authorities believe Resendez-Ramirez has been riding the rails, finding victims along the way. All eight slayings took place on or near railroad tracks.

"What we've learned about him through profiling, it's just a matter of time before he kills again."

— Mike Cox
Texas Department of Public Safety

As for a motive, Clark said: "I wish I could tell you."

The task force, assembled earlier this month after authorities connected the killings, has stopped and searched freight trains as part of its manhunt, and freight railroads have stepped up security.

Agents also have circulated photographs of Resendez-Ramirez in towns along his suspected path.

"What we've learned about him through profiling, it's just a matter of time before he kills again," Mike Cox, spokesperson for the Texas Department of Public Safety, said.

Jackson County, Ill., State's Attorney Mike Wepseic said fingerprints found on an abandoned truck connect Resendez-Ramirez to the two killings. The bodies of George Morber, 80, and his 52-year-old daughter, Carolyn Frederick, were found June 15 in his home in Gorham, 100 yards from the railroad tracks.

Court to decide anti-smut

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court agreed to decide whether it went too far in trying to regulate TV channels like Playboy from getting glimpses of the raunchy stuff.

The Clinton administration is trying to revive the FCC, which was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1997. The FCC was trying to keep children from seeing sex-oriented programming networks only partly available for non-subscribers.

Society has an interest in seeing to it that children are not exposed to sexually explicit materials," the government lawyer said.

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