

Posted: 11/30/2011



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"The threat that border corruption poses to national security---it's by far the greatest threat that we're trying to address." -FBI

There is no question, U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents put their lives on the line every day.

But the ABC15 Investigators discovered a growing number of border agents also breaking the law and putting our nation's security at risk.

The Chase Begins

It was a Wednesday night and ABC15 was on the front line with border patrol agents in Naco, Arizona.

We went on a ride-a-long with the Tucson Sector's Border Patrol Agents Brent Cagen and Claude Stacey.

The agents spotted two people sneaking into the country illegally.

"I saw two people run across the roadway while were driving," said Agent Claude Stacey.

We followed them into the field as they searched.

"You can see it is really thick through here, so they could be hiding," said Agent Stacey.

"Our agents are held to the highest standard of conduct, said Agent Brent Cagen who has been with border patrol for more than three years now.

"When we take the Oath of Office, we are saying that we are going to protect the United States from all enemies, foreign and domestic."

Some of those enemies are domestic.

Agents Violated Laws

The ABC15 Investigators identified a total of 134 current or former agents arrested or indicted for corruption in the past 7 years.

Most of the crimes are considered "mission compromising" meaning authorities believe the agents violated laws and went to prison for their crimes.

“This breach of trust is something we do not stand for,” said Alan D. Bersin, Commissioner of U.S. Customs and Border Protection who testified in front of Congress last June.

Commissioner Bersin admitted corruption cases have “disgraced” his agency and “betrayed public trust.”

“It is our job to minimize those and prevent corruption, detect it, prosecute it,” said Commissioner Bersin, “We recognize there's work to be done.”

Special Agent Jay Brown heads the FBI Border Corruption Taskforce in Tucson.

“It's a pretty big threat. The possibilities [are] a big threat,” said Special Agent Brown.

Some examples of the crimes:

- One agent used his own patrol car to smuggle drugs.
- FBI surveillance cameras caught another agent allowing illegal aliens through a point of entry without checking their documentation. He was arrested just a few hours later and sentenced to five years in prison.
- Another recent case involves a different agent who pled guilty to selling national security documents. The border patrol relies on sensors embedded in the ground to track smugglers. Just a few months ago, an agent in Tucson pled guilty to giving a drug trafficker the locations of more than 100 of the sensors. Prosecutors say he did it for a \$3,000 bribe. That agent was sentenced to 20 months in prison.

“It happens. I don't know any agents personally. I don't associate with known criminals, said Agent Cagen.

“They'll face the consequences of the justice system.”

Complaints and Violations

Border Patrol is just one division of U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

The whole department, with 14 offices, employees more than 60,000 men and women.

The 134 agents arrested for corruption represent less than 1 percent of that workforce.

But, according Special Agent Brown, it only takes one rogue agent to pose a threat.

“The other thing you have also is a terrorism threat. Are people from certain parts of the world trying to come in through Mexico through the southern Arizona border?”

Over the past five years, there have been 19,776 complaints and violations filed against border protection agents.

More than half resulted in suspensions, demotions or reprimands. About 700 were fired and more than 900 resigned.

Here is the exact breakdown as of October 2011:

- **9,119 - No action** means after a review, nothing was done.
- **440 - Removal** means they were removed from their job; fired.
- **999 - Reprimand** is a verbal reprimand.
- **941 - Resigned**
- **4,146 - Written reprimand** is a letter in writing.
- **13 - Demotion** occurs when a new employee on probation is demoted to a lower position.
- **261 - Termination** occurs when employees who are on probation are fired.
- **42 - Downgrade** occurs when employees who are not on probation are downgraded in level.
- **3,815 - Suspension** ranges from 1-45 days.

By 2013, the Anti-Border Corruption Act will require all border protection agents be polygraphed before they get hired along with background checks every five years.

The Chase Ends

The dedicated agents we road along with that Wednesday night, found the two young women who jumped the fence.

They were hiding in a nearby school presumably waiting for the friends or relatives to come and pick them up.

Read more: http://www.abc15.com/dpp/news/local_news/investigations/corruption-in-border-protection-involves-smuggling-and-selling-national-secrets#ixzz1koOF2Fyn