



Written by [Warren Mass](#) on September 27, 2018

Border Patrol Cracks Down on Human Smuggling Across Southwest Border

Operation Blazing Sands is a joint operation consisting of Border Patrol agents from the El Centro and Yuma Border Patrol sectors that began in mid-August and made its first arrest that month. The operation was started to deter illegal border crossings and human smuggling attempts after the agency noticed an increase in such activities in the desert along the California-Mexico border.



A report posted on the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) website on August 29 noted that Border Patrol agents had just had their first success under the new operation, when they immobilized a Jeep driven by a U.S. citizen who was transporting four Mexican citizens who had entered the United States illegally.

“Operation Blazing Sands started earlier this month and already the Yuma and El Centro sectors have seen great success,” said Chief Patrol Agent Gloria I. Chavez. “The two sectors will continue to combat the Transnational Criminal Organizations working to break the laws of our country.”

As the operation continued, other arrests were made, most along Interstate 8, which parallels the U.S.-Mexico border. In every case reported so far, the drivers of the vehicles carrying illegal aliens have been U.S. citizens. In such cases, the drivers were charged with alien smuggling, while the passengers were processed for removal back to Mexico.

A report in the San Diego *Union-Tribune* on September 24 cited Border Patrol agent Justin Castrejon, who said the goal of Operation Blazing Sands is to stop human smuggling along the border between Calexico, California, and Yuma, Arizona.

Castrejon said that after agents arrest the human smugglers, they backtrack to the border to look for people that might have been left behind. He said the smugglers often abandon people who become sick or injured because they don’t want to slow down the group.

“Smugglers don’t have any regard for human life,” he said. “All they care about is money.”

There is also a humanitarian aspect to Operation Blazing Sands, Castrejon told the *Union-Tribune*. He said Border Patrol agents in the El Centro Sector have found 14 people who died crossing the border so far in fiscal 2018, many of those being in the east desert area.

“A lot of times, people will get in trouble and underestimate their abilities,” Castrejon said. “The terrain is unforgiving.”

Agents treat many aliens who cross the border in this area for heat exhaustion, he said.



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