U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Air and Marine Southwest Border Region

FACT SHEET

The Southwest Border Region is the highest priority area of responsibility for U.S. Customs and Border Protection and the Office of Air and Marine (OAM). The border provides a nexus point where three transnational threats converge: drug trafficking, human smuggling and terrorism. Drug and human traffickers exploit the Southwest Border Region in two directions, smuggling drugs and people from Mexico into the United States and moving large amounts of money from the United States into Mexico. Heroin, marijuana, cocaine and methamphetamine bound for the United States are produced in or transited through Mexico.

A significant amount of aerial smuggling takes place in Mexico. Smugglers take off from central Mexico marijuana fields to offload sites near the border, specifically in the Mexican states of Baja California Norte and Sonora. The drugs are then smuggled across the border using vehicles, vessels, pack animals, humans, tunnels and ultralights, which are small and lightweight aircraft capable of carrying 200 to 500 pounds of contraband.

OAM partners with many state and local taskforces and interagency groups such as the El Paso Intelligence Center and Joint Field Command in Arizona to combat these threats. The National Air Training Center oversees education for OAM agents and officers conducting law enforcement operations.

Southwest Border Region at a Glance:

- **Area of Responsibility**

  Spans more than 2,000 miles of international border with Mexico.

- **Geography/Weather Challenges**

  Extremely harsh and inhospitable terrain, representing a significant challenge to border security. The region includes hundreds of miles of open desert, rugged mountains, the Rio Grande River and coastal waters. The region is extremely hot and dry, with little ground shade.

An AS-350 in the Southwest Border Region