



Stop Border Deaths Now!

A project of the Border Working Group

Attn: Immigration Policy Aide

June 6, 2005

More than 2000 people have died along the U.S.-Mexico border in the past five years, coming to this country in search of a better life. In an effort to educate members of Congress about the direct link between U.S. policy and these deaths, the Washington, DC based Border Working Group will be providing you with information twice a month to highlight each death of the summer, just as we have on the back of this sheet. The Border Working Group is a coalition of over one dozen churches and human rights groups working to end the deaths on the border.

In 1993, the United States Border Patrol initiated a strategy to curb undocumented migration into the United States across the border with Mexico. Known as the Southwest Border Strategy, it aimed to effectively seal off urban areas, under the logic that migrants would not risk their lives to enter the United States.

Ten years after this policy began, the consequences are clear. Migrants do risk their lives to find work in the United States. Because urban areas are now sealed, migrants are forced to travel through remote and dangerous stretches of desert that kills hundreds of people a year. ***Since 2000, the Border Patrol has documented 1854 migrant deaths to date – a staggering number for 4 ½ years.*** This does not include migrants whose bodies have not been found.

The Southwest Border Strategy has dramatically increased the resources going to the Border Patrol, yet migration to the United States has not decreased as a result. Since 1993, the number of Border Patrol agents along the U.S.-Mexico border has more than doubled– ***there are now more than 9,500 agents patrolling 2,000 miles of border. That's five agents per mile.*** This summer, more than 2000 agents will patrol Arizona - one agent for every 1000 feet of border. The border patrol has also built over 78 miles of fencing in urban areas across the southwest border at a cost in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Despite these resources, ***the Immigration and Naturalization Service (now the Bureau of Immigration and Citizenship Services) has acknowledged that approximately 75,000 more undocumented migrants entered the U.S. per year between 1990 and 1999 than they originally estimated.*** Current estimates put the number of unauthorized entries at over 350,000 per year.

Current Border Patrol policies along the southwest border are untenable. They have failed in their mission, and the only result of increased Border Patrol surveillance is the deaths of thousands of people. Last year, Congressman Jim Kolbe (R-AZ) acknowledged that 99% of the people crossing the Southwest border are not a threat to national security. He has acknowledged, as many are beginning to do, that the only way to reduce undocumented migration is to reform our immigration system. These reforms will also reduce the number of migrant deaths each year by providing workers with a legal way on entry in to the U.S.

In addition to a reform of our immigration policies, border security needs to be reoriented from a policy focused on deterring migrants to one focused on terrorism. The strategies, tools, and resources going to border security do not address this problem in an adequate way. Rather than continuing to reinforce our current system, the Border Patrol needs to devise a new strategy that can address this mission, and reorganize its use of staffing, technology, and infrastructure to meet this new challenge.

We hope that the information that we provide to you over the course of the summer will help you to understand the tragic costs of the failed Southwest Border Strategy and provide you with the resources necessary to work on appropriate solutions.

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In the month of May 2005, over 40 people died trying to enter the United States. The majority of these deaths occurred in Arizona, with Texas placing second for migrant deaths. Below are a few of the victims' stories.

May 2: Jose Ortiz uses a cell phone to call for help after his wife and four others die from heat exposure. Ortiz and his companions crossed the border 10 days earlier and ended up somewhere in the Lechuguilla Desert, AZ. Ortiz's cell phone went dead 14 minutes after the call was placed. None of the 5 bodies have been recovered.

May 4: A Hispanic male between the ages of 30 and 40 is found in the Chiricahua Mountains near Portal, AZ. He is wearing jeans, a black belt, white socks and black loafer-type shoes. He is found on a blanket under a tree with a shirt and two empty water jugs. He has been dead for days.

May 5: An unidentified male dies near Wellton in western Arizona from exposure to the elements.

May 7: A woman dies in Border Patrol custody in Texas. The incident is being investigated by the FBI.

May 11: Juan de Jesus Rivera is shot and killed by a Border Patrol Agent on the Tohono O'odham Indian Nation near Ajo, AZ. The 16-year-old from Sonoyta, Sonora was driving a white Dodge pick-up truck carrying other migrants.

May 17: The body of a 34-year-old Hispanic male is discovered badly decomposed floating in the Rio Grande, in southwest Texas.

May 21: A Mexican woman dies from heat exposure 25 miles north of Sasabe, south of Tucson, AZ. and is found at 5:30 pm. Within the next 24 hours, 2 more men die in the same area.

May 21: A Mexican national dies from heat exposure and is found on Empirita Road and Interstate 10 in Arizona.

May 21: Viridiana Herrera Aguilar, 18, dies while traveling with her husband and 8 others. They were found on the Barry M. Goldwater Range 3.5 miles east of San Luis, AZ.

May 22: A 19-year-old Mexican man from Nicolas Romero dies from heat related injuries 4 miles northeast of Bisbee, AZ. He was dead for 4 hours before his body was discovered.

May 22: Marcela Cruz-Gonzalez, 24, dies 12 miles east of the San Luis Port, AZ., while waiting for her husband to return with help. She and her unborn baby died from severe dehydration.

May 23: Two unidentified bodies are found at 4:45 am on the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation in Arizona.

May 23: A 22-year-old Mexican woman dies of dehydration on the Barry M. Goldwater Range east of Yuma, AZ.

May 23: Nicolas Francisco Jose, 15, dies from hypothermia on the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation, one mile west of Vahalla Road in Arizona.

May 23: The body of a 30 to 40 year old man is found decomposing in an abandoned house on the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation in Arizona. A rancher reported the death, which did not occur in the latest heat wave.

May 25: An unidentified woman dies from drowning in the El Paso canal in Texas.

May 25: Four male migrants drown in the Rio Grande near Del Rio in Texas. A Border Patrol surveillance video records the men slipping one by one into the current.

May 25: A man in his mid to late 40's is found several days after death from heat exposure on Arivaca Road in southeast Arizona.

May 26: An unidentified man dies from heat related injuries just south of Tucson, AZ., east of Three Points.

May 26: A man carrying no identification dies after traveling 7 miles into the desert from Milepost 28 on Arizona Route 286.