

As the Numbers Surge Border Incidents Increase in Arizona

By Janice Kephart

Data gathered by a private organization has documented a sharp rise in illegal entries along the Arizona border.

The non-governmental volunteer group [Secure Border Intelligence](#) uses various official and unofficial sources, including hidden cameras, to compile a list of incidents along a portion of Arizona's border with Mexico. All data are verifiable, but confidential, given the sensitive nature of the work.

Secure Border Intelligence's footage was used in the Center for Immigration Studies video "[Hidden Cameras on the Arizona Border 3: A Day in the Life of a Drug Smuggler](#)".

This *Memorandum* attempts to catalogue and analyze the current sharp rise in illegal entries since August in the context of what the president and Congress should consider as the nation launches into another post-campaign season of "let's talk immigration reform".

Illegal Activity Surging since August. From August 1 to September 23, 2012, more than 1,000 incidents occurred in 915 "hot spots" in a small area stretching from the central Arizona border to about 70 miles north to the Interstate 8 east-west highway, crossing north over the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation to the Barry Goldwater Firing Range and into the Sonoran Desert National Monument. There have been 3,275 incidents from August 1 to October 19. In contrast, just 509 incidents were logged from January through July.

"Incidents" are defined as groups of individuals involved in illegal activity, such as those on foot being smuggled by coyotes, drug packers on foot, drug vehicles operating in tandem, ultralight planes dropping drugs to a group of waiting vehicles, or even a pack of lookout scouts crossing in preparation for another series of drug loads in the near future. Incidents can range in size from a handful to as many as 90 individuals at once. One incident in late October included 200 individuals amassing just south of the border and then dispersing into smaller groups to cross.

As we reported in a [recent blog](#), on October 2, Agent Nicholas Ivie died immediately after being shot in the head by a fellow agent due to confusion surrounding a group of individuals who had set off a sensor about six miles east of Bisbee, Ariz. With bounties on Border Patrol agents and a surge in numbers, it is almost predictable that agents operating in such a tense atmosphere could make such a tragic and fatal mistake.

While the Border Patrol is not apprehending in the traditionally heavily trafficked area of Casa Grande and Gila Bend about 80 miles north of the border at east-west corridor I-8, sometimes they are tracking as many as seven groups at a time in this area via air support. Primarily working this corridor on the ground to fill in the gap left by the Border Patrol is the "West Desert Task Force". The Bureau of Land Management leads often, and operations include representatives from the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area force, the Arizona Department of Public Safety, and Pinal and Maricopa County sheriff's offices. Most often these operations occur at night.

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When operating, the task force often is picking up two incidents per day just between Gila Bend and Casa Grande. This could mean there are actually up to six incidents a night, if the conventional estimate is correct that law enforcement catches just one-third of actual activity in the vicinity of the border.

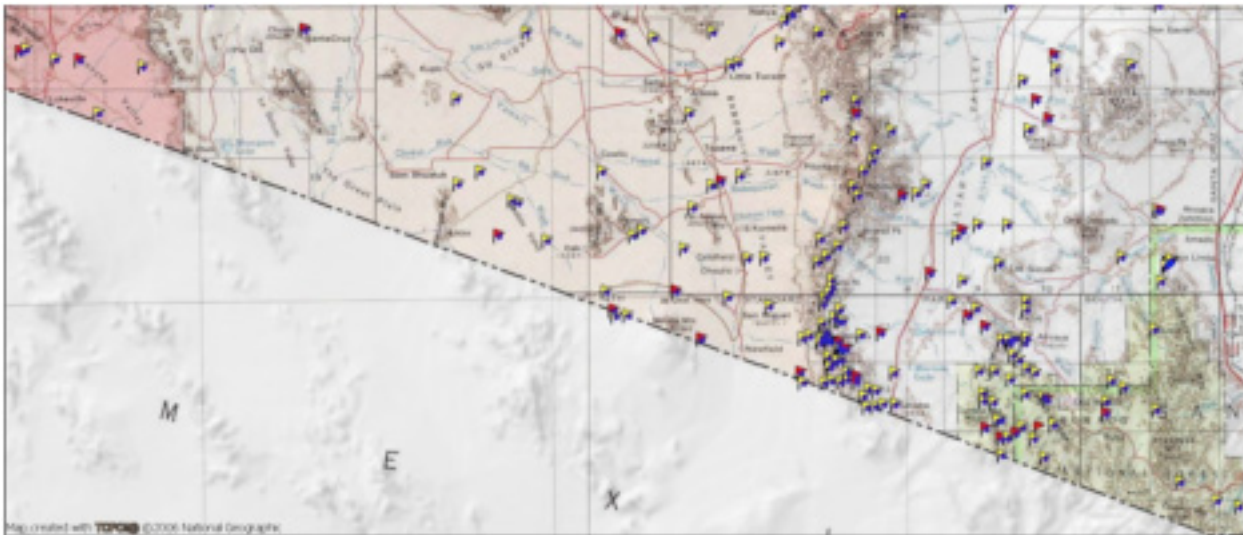
Observation 1. The number of incidents is growing. According to Secure Border Intelligence data, 73 percent of the 1,881 incidents occurred in the 54 days between August 1 and September 23.

In August, the month began with a low of seven incidents on August 5. By August 31, there were 33.

On September 1, there were 38 incidents. By September 29, the month peaked with 62 incidents in one day. On September 30, there were another 38. On October 1, there were 43 incidents.

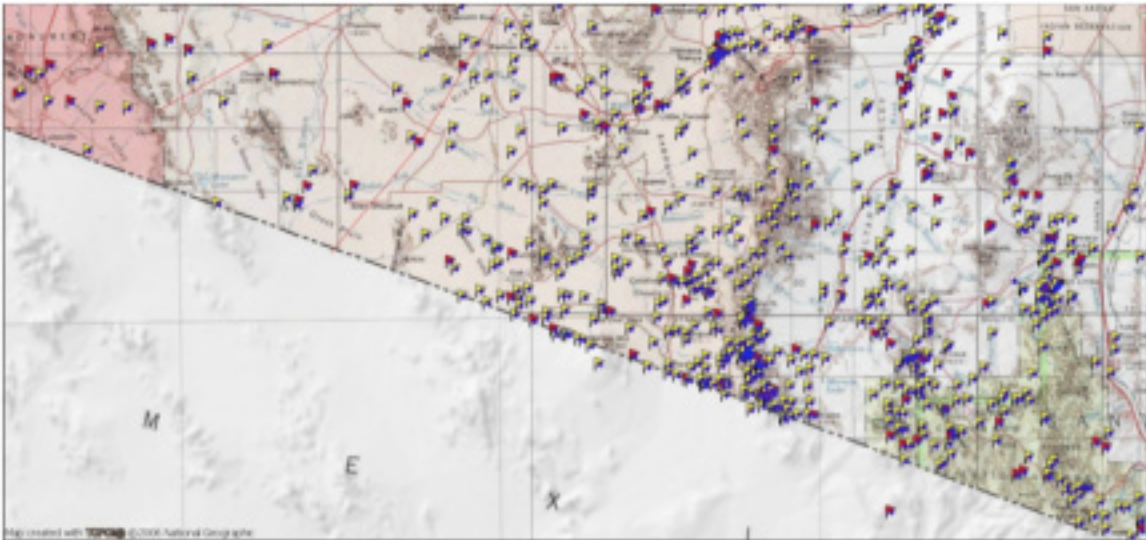
By October 18, the per-day incidents had jumped to 83.

Following are two maps of the Arizona border south of Tucson. The first is from the beginning of the year through July 29, the second through October 22. The Border Patrol estimates that it intercepts only about one-third of illegal crossings; applying the same rule of thumb would suggest these maps are missing some two-thirds of total incidents.



January 1, 2012- July 29, 2012. Red flags are drugs, yellow are human smuggling. Blue dots are actual locations determined via map coordinates.

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January 1, 2012 – October 22, 2012. Red flags are drugs, yellow are human smuggling. Blue dots are actual locations determined via map coordinates.

Observation 2. The size of each incident is growing. One incident in October involved about 200 illegal aliens massed on the Mexican side of the border who then spread out to cross the border in smaller groupings. The area is south of the Baboquivari Mountains — a favorite of coyotes — and is administered by the Bureau of Land Management. It is located about 80 miles southwest of Tucson and just east of the Tohono O’odham Indian Reservation. These mountains are the Tohono O’odham’s holiest location. Recently the area had 100 illegal aliens in five groups of 20 staging to cross the border.

These peaks have seen the largest groups crossing in this area, with a group of 91 in Vamori Wash, just west of these mountains and seven miles north of the border, and two groups of 70 each in the mountains. About 90 people across the three incidents were apprehended and the remaining 141 were not stopped, representing the average of Border Patrol apprehensions.

The incidents have grown so much in both size and number that those tracking them can no longer keep up with counting individuals in a group as they struggle just to keep up with incident numbers. It seems that traditional coyote and cartel concerns about being noticed and stopped due to larger group sizes may be receding.

Observation 3. Drug activity is unabated. Not a single day has passed since August without a drug incident, with as many as 11 in one day. A drug incident is defined as a group involving some combination of multiple drug vehicles, packers, scouts, drug bales, and weapons. Most days included one to three load vehicles. Only six days did not include drug packers. Drug pack horses are also being used, a new tactic for drug runners.

Oddly, only 16 scouts were found, but 20 drug-related arrests included weapons.

A typical drug apprehension goes like this: On October 9 at 1 p.m., 16 miles east of Gila Bend and three miles south of Interstate 8, air support was requested for multiple subjects in custody along with three vehicles filled with 30 bundles of about 648 pounds of marijuana with an estimated street value of \$972,766.90.

Observation 4. Violence continues. Since August there have been four homicides of illegal aliens. From January to August there had been just one.

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Observation 5. Use of ultralight planes to carry drug loads is on the rise. In one incident on October 20, the plane flew 73 miles into U.S. airspace before dropping 10 bales of marijuana. These pilots are crafty, often zig-zagging along the border to test whether they are being followed or possibly about to be intercepted before proceeding across to drop their drug loads.

In this case there were three smugglers on the ground and one load vehicle. All three were apprehended.

Law enforcement does not track these incidents back across the border and does not try to stop airspace incursions; it only seeks out the drugs and runners left on the ground. The October 20 incident unfolded over two hours, as the ultralight entered U.S. airspace, followed a path that allowed it to fly close to the ground, circled until it found the load truck, dropped the load, and returned to Mexico unharmed without ever having been challenged.

The next night another ultralight incursion occurred, but there was no law enforcement activity to track its purpose or stop it.

Observation 6. “The word amnesty possesses remarkable power on the Mexican side of the line. It has the same effect as a starter’s pistol.” — Leo Banks, reporter, [*The Tucson Weekly*](#).

The president began implementing his [deferred action amnesty program](#) in August. Illegal aliens were offered driver’s licenses in California in September. Other states are following suit. Amnesty plus driver’s licenses equals a magnet for an illegal population that seeks both legality and the ID that embodies legality in most places in America — the driver’s license — so they can get a job and live in the United States comfortably. Despite the border violence, abuse, extortion by smugglers, and the high cost of coyotes, plus “border bandits” and “rip crews” within U.S. borders and cartel-controlled corridors, Mexicans and other foreign nationals may well see the value in risking the violence and potential death for the chance at a job and amnesty being offered north of the border.