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## Sheriffs Say They Need Manpower to Seal U.S.-Mexico Border

Wednesday, May 24, 2006  
By Sara Bonisteel

**FOX NEWS**

Sheriff **Joe Arpaio** may have raised some eyebrows with his unorthodox approach to illegal immigration in **Maricopa County, Ariz.**, but his using a new state law to catch undocumented workers has won praise from sheriffs along the nation's 2,000-mile border with Mexico.

Earlier this month, Arpaio used the new law — geared to capturing “coyotes,” or **human smugglers** — to arrest undocumented immigrants for violating local statutes. Charging the illegals with “conspiracy to smuggle themselves,” As of Tuesday, Arpaio and a posse of law enforcement officials and volunteers have detained 224 people.

Officers from California to Texas say they like Arpaio's approach but aren't able to adopt it in their states, where understaffed departments, the reshuffling of **Border Patrol** agents and the lack of state immigration legislation prohibit them from tracking and capturing people crossing the border illegally.

“I don't think our state would allow us to do that sort of thing, or heck, I'd do it,” said Ronny Dodson, the sheriff of **Brewster County**, the largest border county in Texas, in the heart of the state's scenic Big Bend region. His department detains undocumented workers until they can be turned over to federal **Border Patrol** agents.

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With only seven deputies covering Dodson's 6,198-square mile county — an area about four times the size of Rhode Island — tracking undocumented workers as they pass through the rural county to cities like Dallas is nearly impossible, Dodson said.

*(Story continues below)*

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"They can sneak around us," he said. "Someone could hear me coming for miles if I was in a vehicle — he could just lie down and no one would see him."

The problem is compounded by an understaffed U.S. Border Patrol in Dodson's area. Since the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks, border agents must stick to their checkpoints, and a staff of 100 agents has been depleted to 40, lured by incentives to work to close the Arizona border, Dodson said.

Last year, U.S. Customs and Border Patrol began the second phase of the **Arizona Border Control Initiative**, which allowed a 25 percent increase in agents to that state's border through temporary and permanent reassignments as well as new hires.

"I'd like to see more Border Patrolmen and I would personally like to see a federal program where I can get more manpower," Dodson said.

Dodson added that his county could be made more secure with electronic motion sensors in the brushlands. Those sensors could both act as a deterrent to illegal immigrants to pass through his county and could help alert police to border activity.

Manpower is also a problem for **Truth or Consequences, N.M.**

Each month, Sgt. Glenn Hamilton's Sierra County Sheriff's Department catches four or five carloads of immigrants — usually five to 10 people at a time — on Interstate 25 along the Rio Grande.

Since **Gov. Bill Richardson** declared a state of emergency along the Mexican border last August, in effect redeploying many of the Border Patrol agents from Sierra County to Dona Ana County on the Mexican border, Hamilton's department has had to release some of the immigrants it detains. Local officials can hold immigrants from 24 to 48 hours waiting for federal agents before being forced to let them go.

"With the Border Patrol being reassigned or being deployed at various other checkpoints south of us, we just haven't had the availability like we used to," Hamilton said. "We try to get as much information as to where they're heading, the vehicle they're driving, any names that they do give us and then turn that information over to the Border Patrol."

On May 18, President Bush asked Congress for \$1.9 billion to beef up the Border Patrol. The money would pay for deploying up to 6,000 National Guard troops to the border and adding the first 1,000 of 6,000 new Border Patrol agents. Funding for 1,500 more agents was requested in Bush's 2007 budget and White House officials say the president plans to request funding for the additional 3,500 agents over the next two years.



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Like Dodson, Hamilton would like state and local officers to get authority to enforce federal immigration laws. However, it's a legal catch-22 — local authorities in most states cannot arrest undocumented immigrants in their territories as jurisdiction falls to the federal government.



homes since the Iraq War began three years ago, leading some to question the U.S. mission

Under an agreement with the Department of Homeland Security, a handful of states such as Alabama and Florida have trained state troopers to perform some federal immigration enforcement with the supervision of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Other states have tried to bridge the gap between local and federal agencies. Georgia has a law that requires local officials to check the immigration status of those arrested for a felony or drunken driving, and Colorado has a law that requires police to inform ICE of suspected undocumented workers.

According to the **National Conference of State Legislatures**, 15 states — Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Minnesota, Mississippi, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah and Virginia — are considering bills that would authorize cooperation with federal authorities, prohibit cooperation or offer enhanced immigration authority to local law enforcement.

Arpaio has interpreted the new Arizona coyote law to apply to the smuggled individuals. "I'm the elected sheriff and I'm going to do what I feel is right regardless of the controversy," Arpaio said.

Detainees in Maricopa County are housed in a tent city and forced to wear pink underwear and eat green bologna.

According to Maricopa County Sheriff's Lt. Paul Chagolla, one Arizona law-enforcement agency has contacted the department inquiring about how the county charges the undocumented workers under the new law.

Yet for counties like Imperial in Southern California, sealing the border is contingent on staffing. In this 4,597-square mile border county the sheriff also serves as county coroner; catching undocumented immigrants is a low priority.

"We've got a bunch of undocumented immigrants walking through this county, but we've got Border Patrol," Lt. George Moreno said. "If we run into them, obviously we hold them and detain them for Border Patrol to come in and take custody of, but we're not looking for them specifically."

It would take a doubling of his department, Moreno said, for local officials to be able to handle immigration as a separate issue.

"The more people we have, the easier our job is, but that's never going to happen," Moreno said. "Realistically, that won't happen. I think every department within the nation is short."

However, it's the only way to catch the immigrants where they move, officials say.

"I believe in eyes," Dodson said. "The more people you have with eyes out on the ground, the better you can see."

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