

INS raid of complex brings in 74 illegal aliens Crime rate spurs authorities to act

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Body

The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) is flying 68 **illegal aliens** back to Mexico today as a result of a **raid** on a Norcross apartment **complex** this week, according to INS officials. Six **illegal immigrants** also caught in the sweep will leave the country on their own within the next two weeks.

Eighty-three Mexicans, Central and South Americans, mostly men in their 20s, were rounded up Thursday night at the Brook Trails apartment **complex** off Brook Hollow Parkway following a monthlong investigation by Gwinnett and Atlanta police departments and the INS. Gwinnett police say the investigation was sparked by a high incidence of **crime** in the area and suspicions of gang activity.

"For one location they had such inordinate amount of response calls," said INS Assistant Director for Investigations Bart Szafrnicki.

Gwinnett police logged 183 **crimes** in the **complex** from January 1993 to September of this year. Forty percent of those were violent **crimes**, said Sgt. Steve Cline of the Gwinnett County police department. Cline added that gang colors and graffiti are common in the **complex**.

"What has focused our attention on Brook Trails apartments has been the **crime rate**," said Cline. "In the investigation of **crimes**, we found that a large percent of victims and criminals have been **illegal aliens**. Our goal is to reduce the **crime**."

Szafrnicki says rounding up criminal **aliens** has been a priority for the department in the last 18 months, but he estimates that only five to 10 of those caught belong to gangs.

"They are certainly not all gang members," said Szafrnicki, who said the gang members being sent back apparently belong to La Raza gang. "I think we have encountered some gang members, and if we got even one we'll be happy."

Forty-five officers descended on the **complex** Thursday night around 8 p.m., rounding up 83 men. Several were set free, and **74** have waived their right to a hearing in favor of deportation. One of those will be detained until officials can determine if he is wanted in connection with a **crime**.

"It's not enough to close the problem," said Szafrnicki. "But it's certainly enough to send a message out there. We put a dent in it. We put them on notice."

The apartment **complex** was in the news recently after a story appeared in the Atlanta Journal-Constitution detailing reports of substandard living conditions, including apartments overrun with roaches and mice. But Szafrnicki said the **raid** had nothing to do with residents' complaints.

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Local officials say the neighborhood of close to 400 apartments is occupied mostly by Hispanics - Mexican and Colombian - with some Asian residents. Community volunteer Loretta Garcia said VISTA volunteers helped form a youth program there this summer.

Garcia, who is a member of the Baha'i Faith, said the large number of illegals and high **rate** of illiteracy creates a closed community distrustful of outsiders and desperate for help and hope.

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