

ILLEGAL ALIENS' DEATHS SPUR ACTIVIST PATROLS;

VOLUNTEERS OFFER WATER, FOOD, MEDICAL ASSISTANCE

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Body

Frustrated at the mounting **deaths** of **illegal immigrants** in the searing Arizona desert, a group of **activists** has begun **patrolling** to **offer water, food** and **medical assistance**.

At least 91 people have died since October in the U.S. Border **Patrol**'s Tucson sector, covering most of southern Arizona. More than half of those **deaths** have been heat-related.

"It has been a real challenge to figure out how to be most effective in the desert," said Kittie Ufford-Chase, a **volunteer** with the Samaritan **Patrol**. "This has been a needle-in-a-haystack proposition. It's huge out there."

Fewer than a dozen migrants were found in the first three weeks of the **patrols**.

The **patrol**'s organizers include several holdovers from the sanctuary movement, a faith-based effort to help Central Americans fleeing political persecution in the 1980s. Eight sanctuary members were convicted of conspiracy or other charges involving **illegal** entry of **aliens**.

But Samaritan **Patrol** organizers say that their operations are strictly humanitarian and within the law and that their goals are much different.

"It evolved because there were people who were appalled by the almost daily **deaths** of migrants trying to find their way into this country," said Rabbi Joseph Weisenbaum, a sanctuary veteran who helped organize the Samaritan **Patrol**. "It began and continues to function as a humanitarian gesture."

Its 120 to 150 **volunteers patrol** areas where an allied group, Humane Borders, does not have permanent **water** stations for immigrants crossing the desert.

Critics like Wes Bramhall, head of Arizonans for Immigration Control, insist that the Samaritan **Patrol** violates federal law by aiding migrants trying to cross the border from Mexico illegally.

An incident July 9 in which Samaritan **Patrol volunteers** assisted a couple found in the desert prompted Bramhall, 81, to request a Border **Patrol** inquiry.

He says his organization contends that the **patrol** violated eight felony provisions, including transporting **illegal aliens** within the United States.

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William Walker, an attorney for the Samaritan Patrol, says, "They're just wrong. We didn't violate the law, and we don't intend to violate the law."

Three days after the incident, Samaritan Patrol members met with Border Patrol officials. "The outcome was resolved in a satisfactory way for both sides," Border Patrol spokesman Rob Daniels said.

Daniels said he was unaware of any investigation into the group's activities and said no opinion has been issued on Bramhall's letter. But, he said, leaving transportation of immigrants to federal authorities is preferable.

"There needs to be a very, very defined line drawn between rendering aid to someone and actually transporting somebody or furthering their entrance illegally into the United States," Daniels said.

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