

## **BORDER PATROL SWEARS IN 49 AGENTS**

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### **Body**

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The U.S. **Border Patrol** **swore** in **49** new recruits Monday, the latest installment in a federal initiative aimed at cracking down on illegal immigration.

The new **agents** were **sworn** in at the Brown Field **Border Patrol** station. San Diego sector chief Johnny Williams also announced the start of a program aimed at people who smuggle illegal immigrants into the United States.

The new **agents** are part of an infusion of money, equipment and staff directed at the San Diego sector under Operation Gatekeeper, introduced in October by the Immigration and Naturalization Service to curb illegal immigration.

The **agents** will go through the training program at the **Border Patrol** Academy in Georgia before returning to California in September. There are now 1,372 **agents** assigned to San Diego, a 40 percent increase over last year.

Smugglers in demand

But because of Operation Gatekeeper, more illegal crossers are relying on smugglers to navigate the treacherous no-man's land between the two countries and to escort them to points north.

The fees charged by smugglers, known as coyotes, have escalated by more than 50 percent since Operation Gatekeeper began, Williams said.

Smugglers prey on their vulnerable customers, becoming involved in high- speed chases, suffocating and gassing them in car trunks and raping women, said Roberto Martinez, who has monitored human rights along the **border** for 13 years. "They're in it for the money, and they'll take whatever risk they have to take to do this," Martinez said. "I have no sympathy for them."

Dangerous passage

Last month in Jamul, a van crammed with 36 illegal immigrants and driven by an alleged smuggler crashed into a pickup truck on a lonely stretch of highway in eastern San Diego County. Three people, including the driver of the pickup truck, were killed and another 16 were injured.

To stop the smuggling, the **Border Patrol** started Operation Disruption two weeks ago. It has led to the arrest of 20 alleged smugglers and the dismantling of 15 holding sites for undocumented immigrants, known as drop houses, on the U.S. side of the **border**, Williams said.

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Williams credited the program with the apprehension of 600 undocumented immigrants, including citizens of India, El Salvador and Guatemala.

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