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Body

Continuing a crackdown on the smuggling of illegal immigrants, federal authorities made 26 arrests Tuesday at Newark Liberty International Airport, bringing the total to 158 in less than a week.

The immigrants crossed into Arizona from Mexico, hid in safe houses in Phoenix and Los Angeles, then boarded flights to Newark, said officials with the Department of Homeland Security's Immigration and Customs Enforcement division.

The agency is investigating at least two smuggling rings based in the Southwest but had not charged anyone with immigrant smuggling as of yesterday, spokesman Mike Gilhooly said.

"Those organizations are responsible for transporting people across the border, charging them thousands of dollars, taking them to safe houses, and then putting them onto planes," he said.

He would not identify the groups believed responsible.

In the latest arrests, 20 passengers getting off a Continental Airlines flight from Los Angeles that landed at 3:30 p.m. Tuesday were arrested and charged with being in the country illegally. A person who went to meet the group also was arrested on immigration charges.

Two hours later, three passengers from an American Airlines flight from Los Angeles were arrested, along with two people who had arrived at the airport to meet them. All five were held on immigration charges.

Last Thursday, 88 passengers on a flight from Los Angeles were arrested in Newark after authorities got a tip about large-scale movements of illegal immigrants, federal authorities said.

On Saturday, 44 more were arrested on immigration charges. Authorities initially said four of them had been charged with smuggling, but Gilhooly said yesterday that was not the case.

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Those **arrested** were held at various detention centers in New Jersey and were to have their cases presented to immigration judges in the coming **weeks**. Most, if not all, were expected to face deportation proceedings.

Gilhooly said that the agency had received "very specific information and very specific intelligence" about the flights, and that authorities were not engaging in racial or ethnic profiling of Latino passengers.

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