

Minnesota / Immigration roundup targets gangs

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Byline: BY JOHN BREWER Pioneer Press

Body

A weeklong **roundup** of illegal immigrants - all with alleged ties to street **gangs** - netted 34 people in **Minnesota**, the U.S. **Immigration** and Customs Enforcement agency announced Tuesday.

The majority of the arrests were in St. Paul, drawing members from the Sureno-13 and Vatos Locos **gangs**, said Claude Arnold, special agent in charge of investigations out of ICE's Bloomington office.

The local action, part of the national "Operation Community Shield," **targeted** transnational street **gang** members since Sept. 17 and wrapped up Monday.

"There's obviously a **gang** problem here. The good thing about this area is it's not like an L.A. or a Phoenix, where it's kind of like a finger in the dike," Arnold said. "I think there is real hope in preventing the **gang** problem from getting out of control in this area."

Arnold said transnational **gangs** emulate domestic street **gangs** - from street-level drug dealing to drive-by shootings - but differ in having strongholds in foreign countries and will take on cross-border crimes like smuggling drugs, humans and weapons.

ICE teamed with local law enforcement, including the Metro **Gang** Strike Force and **Minnesota** Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, to identify **targets** and make the arrests.

The alleged **gang** members come from Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Somalia and were apprehended across the metro and in the communities of Albany, Willmar and Worthington.

Five were arrested on state criminal charges, nine on federal charges for illegally re-entering the country after deportation, and 20 exclusively for removal proceedings.

Most of the men belonged to the Sureno-13 and Vatos Locos **gangs**, but some came from the Rough Tough Somali Crips and the Mexican Mafia.

Gang members picked up during the local operation have been convicted in the past on charges of criminal sexual conduct, assault with a dangerous weapon, robbery, drug crimes, burglary, drunken driving and firearms violations, according to ICE. Five guns were seized.

Every person arrested will eventually face deportation, Arnold said.

Arnold said Operation Community Shield was started in early 2005 to combat an uptick in transnational **gang** activity. The main focus was on Mara Salvatrucha, or MS-13, a violent **gang** that grew out of the Salvadoran refugee population in Los Angeles during the mid-1990s.

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"Despite the fact that crime was going down in the United States at that time, they were growing," Arnold said of transnational **gangs**.

Since the national operation's start two years ago, more than 100 arrests have been made in **Minnesota**, according to ICE statistics. Nationally, more than 6,500 members from more than 500 **gangs** have been arrested.

John Brewer can be reached at 651-228-2093 or at jbrewer@pioneerpress.com

'Operation Community Shield'

-- **Targets** U.S. street **gangs** with international ties

-- Started in February 2005

-- More than 100 arrests in **Minnesota**

-- More than 6,500 arrests nationally

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