

Federal and Local Law Enforcement Officials Seize Millions Bound for Mexico



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A recent batch of large-scale cash seizures near the U.S.-Mexico border demonstrates a boost in readiness and attention to money trafficking activities in response to the current drug war raging in Mexico, a major priority for U.S. Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano.

On March 6, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers in Texas assisted the Laredo Police Department in the seizure of \$1.2 million in U.S. currency hidden in rolls of carpet inside a tractor-trailer driving southbound on Interstate Highway 35. On March 3, CBP officers worked with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents to act on an anonymous tip and intercept a southbound SUV with Mexico plates, and found a non-factory compartment made of steel and wrapped with lead containing \$1.45 million U.S. currency concealed in the roof of the vehicle. And on March 1, CBP officers conducting outbound operations selected an SUV for inspection and discovered \$561,132 hidden in the spare tire and inside a powdered detergent box.

“Our agents and officers, working together with local law enforcement agencies, are preventing millions of dollars from crossing the border into Mexico,” said Secretary Napolitano. “In stopping the funds that fuel the drug war, we will stifle cartel activity in the United States while helping our neighbors to the south by cracking down on illegal cash before it gets there.”

The final days of February also brought significant victories for CBP and ICE agents working to combat cash movement across the southwest border. On Feb. 20 alone, three separate busts in Laredo garnered \$2.5 million in confiscated U.S. currency.

The March 6 seizure occurred after Laredo Police Department’s Operation Pipeline officers stopped a tractor-trailer loaded with rolls of carpet heading south on I-35. The Laredo Police K-9 alerted officers to the trailer, at which point CBP officers performed an X-ray scan, resulting in an anomaly within the carpet rolls. Inside the rolls, CBP uncovered 57 tape-wrapped bundles of currency, totaling \$1.2 million.

The March 3 bust began with an anonymous telephone call from a male who provided information on a white 2007 Dodge Durango that he stated was headed into Mexico carrying a large sum of money. CBP and ICE agents working in Nogales, Ariz., intercepted the southbound vehicle and, under inspection, discovered a non-factory compartment made of steel and wrapped in lead concealed in the roof of the vehicle. Inside, 16 packages marked with dollar figures and containing a total of \$1.45 million were found.

On March 1, CBP officers in Hidalgo, Texas, selected a black 2007 Jeep Grand Cherokee with Mexico license plates for inspection. Agents found 26 bundles of U.S. currency inside the spare tire underneath the vehicle, and eight additional bundles concealed in a powdered detergent box. The bundles, wrapped in cellophane and duct tape, contained a total of \$561,132 in U.S. currency.

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