

GAO

Briefing Report to the Chairman,  
Subcommittee on Trade, Committee on  
Ways and Means, House of  
Representatives

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September 1996

# CUSTOMS SERVICE

## Drug Interdiction Efforts





**General Government Division**

B-271363

September 26, 1996

The Honorable Philip M. Crane  
Chairman, Subcommittee on Trade  
Committee on Ways and Means  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This briefing report responds to your May 7, 1995, request for information on the U.S. Customs Service. This report, the last in a series,<sup>1</sup> provides information on the drug interdiction efforts of the Customs Service. As one of the more than 50 federal agencies involved in the War on Drugs, Customs is responsible for stopping the flow of illegal drugs across the nation's borders. In addition to routine inspections to search for illegal drugs, Customs' drug interdiction program includes national initiatives, investigations, and other activities unique to specific ports.

As discussed with the Subcommittee, our objectives were to identify and describe the key elements, personnel and equipment resources, budget and operational costs, Operation Hard Line enhancements, and measures of effectiveness of Customs' national drug interdiction program, as well as at its Special Agent-in-Charge (SAC) offices and selected ports in the Miami and San Diego areas.

On July 31 and September 19, 1996, we briefed the Subcommittee on the results of our work.

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## Background

Created in 1789, the U.S. Customs Service is one of the federal government's oldest agencies. Although its original mission was to collect revenue, Customs' mission has expanded to include ensuring that all goods and persons entering and exiting the United States do so in accordance with all U.S. laws and regulations. Moreover, a major goal of Customs is to prevent the smuggling of drugs into the country by creating an effective drug interdiction, intelligence, and investigation capability that disrupts and dismantles smuggling organizations.

Customs performs its mission with more than 19,000 employees at its headquarters, 20 management centers, 20 SAC offices, and 301 ports of entry around the country. Customs collects revenues in excess of \$23

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<sup>1</sup>We have issued the following products in connection with the Subcommittee's request: Customs Service: Status of the Implementation of Blue Ribbon Panel Recommendations (GAO/GGD-96-163, Sept. 3, 1996) and Customs' Reorganization (GAO/GGD-96-81R, Feb. 23, 1996).

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billion annually while processing the estimated 14 million import entries and 450 million people who enter the country each year.

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## Results

The key organizational elements in Customs' drug interdiction program are the Offices of Field Operations and Investigations. These offices employ about 11,000 inspectors, special agents, and other staff to conduct inspections at the ports and investigations at and between the ports. In addition, they use canines and various types of equipment, including X-ray systems, boats, and airplanes, to carry out their duties.

Operation Hard Line is Customs' current effort to address border violence and drug smuggling. First implemented on the Southwest border, Hard Line emphasizes intensified inspections, improved facilities, and the use of technology. It has now been expanded beyond the Southwest border to the southern tier of the United States.

Customs' drug interdiction budget has averaged about \$500 million a year for fiscal years 1990 to 1997.<sup>2</sup> In fiscal year 1995, its drug interdiction budget was about 38 percent and its drug investigation budget was about 3 percent of the federal drug control budget. Most of these funds were spent on salaries and related benefits. Customs has also invested in technologies, such as X-ray units for trucks and containerized cargo, to help detect smuggled drugs.

Customs has developed two types of effectiveness measures: (1) traditional measures that track output and (2) nontraditional measures to track the impact of Customs' drug interdiction efforts. Traditional measures include the number and amount of seizures of drugs and the number of arrests, indictments, and convictions. In fiscal year 1995, Customs seized over 50 percent of all drugs seized by federal agencies and participated in the seizure of an additional 13 percent of the total drugs seized. Customs also developed eight nontraditional measures but has, to date, implemented only one, a measure of the reduction in the number of port runners—drug smugglers who attempt to race a drug-laden vehicle through a port.

Customs is also testing a program designed to measure compliance with all laws it is responsible for enforcing. For drug interdiction, the program is designed to estimate the number of drug smugglers entering the ports, thus providing Customs with a baseline from which to measure how

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<sup>2</sup>Fiscal year 1997 amounts were those requested in the President's fiscal year 1997 budget.

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effective its inspectors are at targeting drug smugglers at the ports. The program is being implemented at major air and land ports.

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## Elements of Customs' Drug Interdiction Program

The Offices of Field Operations and Investigations are the key organizational elements in Customs' drug interdiction program. Among their other responsibilities, they interdict drugs and dismantle smuggling operations by conducting inspections at the ports of entry and investigations at and between the ports.

The Office of Field Operations performs primary—initial—inspection of persons, cargo, and conveyances<sup>3</sup> at air, land, and sea ports around the country. Persons, cargo, and conveyances may also be subject to a more thorough, intensive inspection known as secondary inspection. Nationwide, Field Operations has over 6,600 inspectors and 527 canine enforcement officers to perform inspections. Inspectors use an array of technology in their search for drugs, such as an X-ray system for trucks, X-ray machines for containerized cargo, and fiber-optic scopes to examine gas tanks and other enclosed spaces. Inspectors also target persons, cargo, and conveyances for examination using manifest reviews and databases such as the Treasury Enforcement Communications System, which contains information on suspected smugglers.

The Office of Investigations has about 2,500 special agents (of which up to 1,246 are authorized to work on drug investigations) and about 1,100 more personnel in its aviation, marine, and intelligence units. Office of Investigations' special agents react to and investigate drug seizures at the ports and also develop cases that implicate smuggling organizations. The aviation unit supports foreign interdiction operations, interdict and apprehend air smugglers, and support other Customs and federal, state, and local law enforcement efforts. Marine units interdict, investigate, and apprehend violators that smuggle drugs into the United States via commercial and pleasure vessels. To assist in performing these missions, the air and marine units have 78 vessels, 77 airplanes, and 39 helicopters. The intelligence unit supports Customs' management and all field elements; this involves developing assessments of drug smuggling threats for various parts of the country. For example, threat assessments of the Southwest border led in part to the Customs Commissioner's support for creating a major national initiative, Operation Hard Line, for the Southwest border.

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<sup>3</sup>Conveyances include cars, buses, trucks, aircraft, and vessels.

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## Operation Hard Line

Operation Hard Line was initiated to address border violence and drug smuggling through intensified inspections, improved facilities, and the use of technology at Southwest border ports such as the Otay Mesa Commercial Facility in the San Diego area. Otay Mesa's Operation Hard Line activities have included enhanced canine team cargo screening, an increased number of "block blitz"<sup>4</sup> inspections, and the formation of special teams of inspectors that focus on drug enforcement examinations. As of September 16, 1996, the House had agreed to the administration's request for \$65 million for Operation Hard Line for fiscal year 1997; the Senate had not taken final action on the request. The funds, which are intended to enhance security along the Southwest border, are designated to provide an additional 657 inspectors, canine officers, agents, and support personnel as well as equipment.

Operation Hard Line has been expanded beyond the Southwest border to the southern tier of the United States, including the Caribbean and Puerto Rico, with enhanced air and marine enforcement.<sup>5</sup> For example, Miami International Airport's Operation Hard Line enhancements include increased inspectional coverage as well as the realignment of inspector work hours to better cover high-risk flights.

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## Customs' Drug Interdiction and Investigation Budgets and Estimated Costs

According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy, Customs' combined budget for its drug interdiction and investigation programs averaged \$574 million for fiscal years 1990 to 1996.<sup>6</sup> Customs' budget for drug interdiction alone has averaged about \$500 million a year for these fiscal years; in fiscal year 1995, its drug interdiction budget was about 38 percent and its drug investigation budget was about 3 percent of the federal drug control budget.

Customs does not track its drug interdiction expenditures, although headquarters officials told us that they intend to move in that direction over the next few years. At the ports we visited, Customs officials used different methodologies to estimate their drug interdiction costs. We estimated the costs for the SAC offices we visited by multiplying the

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<sup>4</sup>Inspectors select a group of vehicles for additional inspection using canines and other inspection tools.

<sup>5</sup>An additional \$28 million appropriation for fiscal year 1997 has been approved by the House to reduce air and marine smuggling throughout the Caribbean. If enacted, the appropriation is to be used for additional positions and aircraft, vessels, and facilities in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

<sup>6</sup>The National Drug Control Strategy, 1996: Program, Resources, and Evaluation, The White House, 1996.

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percentage of time agents worked on drug cases by the total budget for each SAC office.

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## Measures of Effectiveness of Customs' Drug Interdiction Program

Customs has traditionally measured the output from its drug interdiction efforts by the resulting number of seizures, arrests, indictments, and convictions. For example, in fiscal year 1995, Customs reported about 2,200 cocaine seizures, about 900 heroin seizures, and about 10,000 marijuana seizures—over 50 percent of all drugs seized by federal agencies—and participation in the seizure of an additional 13 percent of the total drugs seized. Customs also reported that it made 8,065 drug arrests and obtained 4,304 drug indictments and 4,262 drug convictions.

These traditional measures, however, track activity, not outcome or effectiveness. Several Customs officials, for example, made this point by noting that it is unclear whether an increase in seizures indicates that Customs has become more effective or that the amount of smuggling has increased significantly. We have previously noted that traditional measures, such as the number of seizures, pose problems for measuring the performance of drug interdiction programs.<sup>7</sup> We also recognize that developing sound, results-oriented performance measures and accompanying data is a difficult and time-consuming task.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to the traditional measures, in 1995 Customs identified eight nontraditional measures for use assessing the effectiveness of its drug strategy initiative. The measures include a reduction in the number of port runners and the ratio of seizures to examinations conducted for cargo and passengers. For example, there was a 38-percent decline in port runners from fiscal year 1994 to 1995 at the San Ysidro border crossing. This reduction was attributed, in part, to an Operation Hard Line enhancement—the installation of permanent concrete barriers to impede high-speed vehicle traffic and lane switching through the port. Officials said they anticipate refinement of Customs' nontraditional measures as they gain more experience in capturing and analyzing the data.

In addition to these measures, Customs is estimating the number of persons violating U.S. laws, including smuggling drugs, at major air and land ports. For example, during a recent 6-month period, Customs tested a

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<sup>7</sup>Drug Interdiction: Funding Continues to Increase but Program Effectiveness Is Unknown (GAO/GGD-91-10, Dec. 11, 1990).

<sup>8</sup>Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act (GAO/GGD-96-118, June 1996).

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program called Compliance Examination (COMPEX) at Miami International Airport. During this period, 4.4 million international passengers passed through the airport. During the test, Customs detected

- 555 drug smugglers through normal targeted examinations and
- 3 additional drug smugglers from a random sample of 7,543 passengers who did not receive a targeted examination.

On the basis of these results, Customs estimated that

- approximately 1,600 drug smugglers passed through the port undetected and
- approximately 25 percent of the drug smugglers entering the port were apprehended.

Customs also estimated that only a small number of the 4.4 million passengers—1 in 1,968—were smuggling drugs. Customs anticipates that COMPEX data will allow it to establish a baseline from which to measure its effectiveness in detecting drug smugglers over time.

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## Customs Faces Challenges

In trying to stop the flow of drugs across the nation's borders, Customs faces challenges on two levels. Its major challenge is to effectively carry out its drug interdiction and trade enforcement missions while facilitating the flow of persons and cargo across the borders. Customs has to perform these missions despite the continuous and extensive threat from drug smugglers along the borders.

Customs faces specific challenges in evaluating its drug interdiction mission. First, because its financial information systems are not designed to account for costs by mission component, Customs estimates what it is spending for drug interdiction overall. This affects Customs' ability to determine whether allocation of additional resources at specific ports or in a specific region has produced commensurate benefits. Customs officials told us they are developing mission- and performance-based budgets, in accordance with Department of the Treasury directives, that will enable them to determine with greater reliability the costs of drug interdiction activities throughout Customs.

Second, Customs—like other law enforcement agencies engaged in the fight against drug smuggling—has attempted to develop performance measures. Traditional output measures do not allow officials to gauge the



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effectiveness of drug interdiction activities. Even the new nontraditional measures being developed may not allow Customs to assess, over time, whether increased efforts are producing better outcomes.

Finally, special agents investigating drug smuggling activities, especially in the San Diego area, said they are limited in their efforts to identify sources and destinations of drugs smuggled across the Southwest border because so much of their time is spent on thousands of marijuana cases, most of which involved less than 100 pounds of marijuana each. Agents told us that, given their resources, the time they devote to these “port cases” keeps them from investigating other promising leads.

Because our fieldwork was limited to Customs’ offices in Miami and San Diego, we cannot say with certainty that the challenges existing in those two offices also exist throughout Customs’ field offices. However, because Miami and San Diego represent two areas with a high volume of passenger and cargo traffic and a high risk for drug smuggling, we believe that the challenges Customs faces at these locations are important factors for both Congress and the Customs Service to consider when assessing the effectiveness of Customs’ drug interdiction activities.

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## Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our objectives were to provide information on the following aspects of the Customs Service’s drug interdiction activities nationally and in the Miami and San Diego field areas:

- key elements,
- personnel and equipment resources,
- budget or operational costs,
- Operation Hard Line, and
- measures of effectiveness.

In the Miami field area, we conducted our work at the Miami International Airport, Miami Seaport, Miami SAC Office, and Miami Aviation Branch. In the San Diego field area, we conducted our work at the San Ysidro passenger port, Otay Mesa Commercial Facility, San Diego SAC Office, and San Diego Aviation Branch.

To obtain an overview of Customs’ drug interdiction program, we interviewed key officials and reviewed budget and program documents at headquarters. In the two field areas, we interviewed key officials, observed their drug interdiction operations, and obtained and reviewed data on

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budget, workload, and performance. We also reviewed the drug interdiction operations of the SACS, marine groups, and aviation branches. We chose the two field areas because they contained ports with (1) high volumes of passenger and cargo traffic and a corresponding high risk for drug smuggling, (2) SAC offices with marine groups and large numbers of drug cases, and (3) aviation branches.

We had several limitations in doing this work. First, because Customs does not track drug interdiction and investigation costs, costs were estimated by Customs; in some cases, we also estimated the costs. Second, because of time constraints, we did not verify operational enhancements attributed to Operation Hard Line. Finally, the sampled ports' elements, resources, costs, and measures of effectiveness were unique to each port, were not intended to be comparable, and, therefore, cannot be generalized to other ports.

We did our work between March and September 1996 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

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## Agency Comments

At a meeting on September 12, 1996, Customs' Director, Office of Planning and Evaluation, and other officials provided comments on a draft of this report. They generally agreed with the overall contents of the report but provided technical clarifications, which we incorporated where appropriate.


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We are sending copies of this report to your Committee's Ranking Minority Member and to the Chairmen and Ranking Minority Members of other congressional committees that have responsibilities related to these issues, the Secretary of the Treasury, the Commissioner of Customs, and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. We will also make copies available to others on request.

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The major contributors to this report are listed in appendix I. If you need any additional information or have further questions, please contact me on (202) 512-8777.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Norman Rabkin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'N'.

Norman J. Rabkin  
Director, Administration  
of Justice Issues

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**Appendix I**  
**Major Contributors to**  
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**Abbreviations**

COMPEX	Compliance Examination Program
ONDCP	Office of National Drug Control Policy
SAC	Special Agent-in-Charge

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# Customs' National Drug Interdiction Program

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**GAO** Key Elements of Customs' National Drug Interdiction Program

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Customs seeks to interdict drugs and disrupt and dismantle smuggling operations through inspections and investigations

The Offices of Field Operations and Investigations are primarily responsible for drug interdiction and investigation activities

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**Key Elements of Customs'  
National Drug Interdiction  
Program**

Drugs can enter the United States at or between the 301 ports of entry by air, land, and sea. They can be transported by or in people, cargo, and conveyances, including cars, trucks, aircraft, and vessels.

Customs seeks to prevent the smuggling of drugs into the United States by attempting to create an effective drug interdiction, intelligence, and investigation capability that disrupts and dismantles smuggling organizations.

The key organizational elements in Customs' drug interdiction program are the Offices of Field Operations and Investigations. Customs' Field Operations Division consists of inspectors, canine enforcement officers, and other personnel such as operational analysis specialists. Customs' Office of Investigation consists of special agents and personnel in its aviation, marine, and intelligence units.

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## GAO Field Operations Key Elements

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**Targeting** is the selection of high-risk persons, cargo, and conveyances for a thorough inspection

**Primary inspection** is the initial screening at a port

**Secondary inspection** is a more thorough, intensive inspection of selected persons, cargo, and conveyances

**Other detection activities** are also used by inspectors to detect drugs

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Although inspectors have the option to conduct a thorough examination of all persons, cargo, and conveyances entering the country, they selectively choose or “target” for a thorough inspection those that they consider high risk for drug smuggling. Targeting is generally done through the use of databases available to Customs. These databases provide information on passengers, cargo manifests, and criminal histories that inspectors review to help identify individuals, cargo, or conveyances that pose a threat. One database system Customs uses is the Treasury Enforcement

Communications System, which contains information to assist inspectors in identifying potential violators.

Primary inspection is the initial screening by Customs inspectors of individuals, cargo, and conveyances that enter U.S. ports. These inspections may include a document review and additional checks, such as license plate or driver identification checks. Inspectors also rely on their training to detect behavior that alerts them to potential drug violators. They may refer any suspect person or conveyance for the more thorough, intensive "secondary" inspection.

Secondary inspection may include searching a person, a conveyance, or selected cargo. For automobiles, this may include a detailed seven-point examination, using a canine and other detection tools, to discover hidden drugs. For cargo it may include off-loading and searching individual containers until the inspectors are satisfied that they contain no drugs.

Customs inspectors have a variety of other detection methods available to help them detect illegal drugs. For example, specially trained drug-detector canines work with canine enforcement officers at air, sea, and land border ports. In preprimary inspection (the type of inspection carried out before primary), "rovers" target passengers for intensive inspections. Rovers are teams of inspectors who, along with canine enforcement officers, attempt to identify potential smugglers through behavioral analysis, prior intelligence, or canine alert. Other detection methods include special enforcement examinations, such as "block blitzes," in which inspectors select a group of vehicles for complete inspection using canines and other inspection tools.

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GAO Field Operations Resources as of May  
1996

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Personnel

- 6,689 inspectors
- 527 canine enforcement officers

Equipment and technology

- Portable contraband detectors
  - Fiber-optic scopes
  - X-ray machines
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Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**Field Operations  
Resources**

As of May 1996, Customs had 6,689 inspectors and 527 canine enforcement officers nationwide who used a variety of equipment and technology to assist the inspection process.

Equipment and technology Customs uses for screening and drug interdiction activities include databases; portable contraband detectors ("busters"); sonic and laser range finders; fiber-optic scopes; and baggage, pallet, and mobile X-ray systems. Busters detect hidden contraband; range finders locate false walls and hidden compartments; fiber-optic scopes permit the visual examination of gas tanks and other enclosed spaces. Inspectors use hand tools such as hammers, drills, and pry bars. They also use steel probes to detect drugs in flowers and bulk materials. Canines are used in every stage of inspection.

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GAO Office of Investigations Key Elements

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Investigate drug seizures made at the ports

Work with federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies to interdict drugs and dismantle smuggling organizations

Initiate drug smuggling investigations, including maritime investigations

Interdict drug smuggling by private aircraft

Develop strategic and tactical intelligence, including threat assessments

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**Office of Investigations  
Key Elements**

Special agents assigned to 20 Special Agent-in-Charge (SAC) offices located throughout the United States conduct a variety of investigations. The special agents investigate drug cases resulting from seizures inspectors make at the ports. These investigations may include interrogating drug smugglers and conducting "controlled deliveries," which occur when agents follow smugglers (with their consent) to their destination and attempt to apprehend additional smugglers and/or additional drugs.

These agents also independently develop drug investigations and intelligence on suspected drug smuggling operations and work with other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. Twelve SAC offices have marine units whose mission is to interdict drugs smuggled into the United States via commercial vessels, fishing vessels, and pleasure craft.

Seventeen aviation branches and units, located primarily along the southern border, (1) support foreign interdiction operations by providing aircraft and air crews to identify and track suspected drug smuggling aircraft operating in or departing from South American source countries and (2) maintain an air interdiction response capability within the United States to deter the use of general aviation aircraft for smuggling drugs into the United States.

The Domestic Air Interdiction Command Center requires aviation branches to have aircraft on standby to intercept suspect drug smugglers within 8 minutes of an alert. The Center conducts 24-hour radar surveillance of the entire U.S. southern border and provides communications and radar tracking information to Customs' aircraft and ground units nationwide.

Headquarters and SAC office intelligence units produce strategic threat analyses for Customs' management and tactical intelligence on potential drug smugglers at the field level. For example, threat assessments on the Southwest border led, in part, to the Commissioner's support for initiating Operation Hard Line.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Operation Hard Line is Customs' effort to address border violence and drug smuggling through intensified inspections, improved facilities, and technology.

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GAO Office of Investigations Resources as  
of August 1996

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Personnel

- 1,246 special agents authorized to conduct drug investigations, 64 marine enforcement officers, 770 air program personnel (including about 300 pilots), and 300 intelligence analysts

Equipment

- 78 vessels, 77 airplanes, and 39 helicopters
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Source: U.S. Customs Service.



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**Office of Investigations  
Resources**

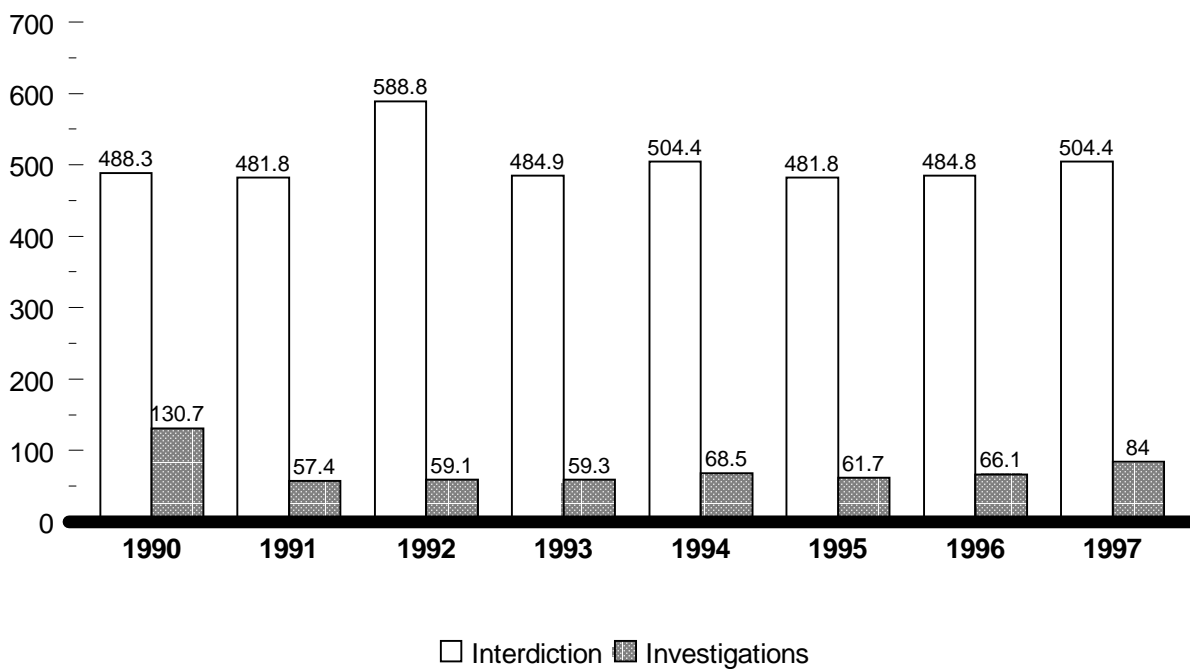
As of August 1996, Customs' Office of Investigations personnel included 2,523 special agents (of which 1,246 were authorized to conduct drug investigations), 64 marine enforcement officers, 770 air program personnel (including about 300 pilots), and about 300 intelligence analysts.

Customs' marine units have a fleet of 78 vessels, including 3 classes of marine vessels: (1) utility boats used for various activities, including patrolling waterways for suspect smuggling boats; (2) interceptors, vessels capable of and used exclusively for high-speed chases or interception of speed boats suspected of retrieving illegal contraband from the water; and (3) Blue Water vessels, ocean-going vessels that are large pleasure craft routinely used for covert or undercover operations.

The aviation branches have a total of 116 aircraft available for deployment: 77 airplanes, such as the Cessna Citation, and 39 helicopters, such as the customized Black Hawk.

# GAO Customs' Drug Interdiction and Investigation Budgets, FYs 1990--1997

Dollars in millions



Note: Fiscal Year 1997 amounts are requested.

Source: ONDCP.

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**Customs' Drug Interdiction  
and Investigation Budgets,  
Fiscal Years 1990—1997**

According to data from the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP), Customs' combined budgets for its drug interdiction and investigation programs averaged \$574 million for fiscal years 1990 to 1996.<sup>2</sup> Fiscal year 1997 amounts were those requested in the President's fiscal year 1997 budget.

Customs' budget for drug interdiction alone averaged about \$500 million a year for fiscal years 1990 to 1997; it decreased from 38 percent of the federal drug interdiction budget in fiscal year 1995 to 35 percent in the fiscal year 1997 request.

Customs' drug investigations budget averaged \$72 million for fiscal years 1990 to 1996. Customs' drug investigations budget accounted for 3.4 percent of the total federal drug investigations budget in fiscal year 1995 and rose to 4.2 percent in the fiscal year 1997 request.

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<sup>2</sup>The National Drug Control Strategy, 1996: Program, Resources, and Evaluation, The White House, 1996.

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## GAO Operation Hard Line--a National Initiative

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Current effort to address border violence and drug smuggling through intensified inspections, improved facilities, and use of technology

Relies on local development and testing of methods to prevent drug smuggling

Uses overtime, reprogrammed, and other funds

Started with the Southwest border and has expanded to the southern tier

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According to Customs officials, drug smugglers have used a variety of methods to smuggle drugs into the United States, including an approach called "port running"—racing a drug-laden car or van through a Customs inspection point. That smuggling method, which sometimes resulted in gun battles and high-speed chases, not only brought tons of drugs into the United States but posed tremendous danger to law enforcement officials and civilians.

Operation Hard Line was initiated in February 1995 to address the problems of violence and drug smuggling along the Southwest border. Hard Line focuses on strengthening and tightening security at ports by intensifying inspectional processes, improving port facilities, and increasing the use of technology in drug interdiction efforts.

Hard Line emphasizes enhanced preprimary inspections, performing more secondary inspections, conducting more intensive cargo searches, installing concrete barriers to manage traffic flow, and providing an increase in investigative support. Hard Line promotes "strategic problem solving" by relying on internal experts at each port to develop and test creative new ways to prevent drug smuggling.

To fund Hard Line activities in fiscal year 1995, Customs relied, in part, on additional overtime funding and reprogrammed funds as well as \$13 million from fiscal year 1995 rescission funds. In fiscal year 1996, Customs received \$26 million in appropriated funds for Operation Hard Line activities.

As of September 16, 1996, the House had agreed to the administration's request for \$65 million for Operation Hard Line for fiscal year 1997; the Senate had not taken final action on the request. The funds, which are intended to enhance security along the Southwest border, are designated to provide an additional 657 inspectors, canine officers, agents, and support personnel as well as equipment.

The second phase of Operation Hard Line, begun in March 1996, focuses on the high-risk areas of the southern tier, which include Florida and the Gulf of Mexico area. In the Caribbean and Puerto Rico, also part of the southern tier, the second phase funds enhanced air and marine enforcement.<sup>3</sup> According to the Director, Anti-Smuggling Division, a major part of the plan is to temporarily detail inspectors, agents, intelligence officers, and pilots to locations along the southern tier to increase the drug enforcement interdiction efforts there.

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<sup>3</sup>An additional \$28 million appropriation for fiscal year 1997 has been approved by the House to reduce air and marine smuggling throughout the Caribbean. If enacted, the appropriation is to be used for additional positions and aircraft, vessels, and facilities in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands.

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GAO Measures of Effectiveness of Customs'  
Drug Interdiction Program

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Traditional measures track Customs'  
activity but do not measure impact or  
effectiveness

Nontraditional measures developed to  
track the impact of Customs' drug  
interdiction efforts

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**Measures of Effectiveness  
of Customs' Drug  
Interdiction Program**

Customs, like many law enforcement agencies, has traditionally measured the output from its drug interdiction efforts by the number of drug seizures and arrests made as well as by the number of indictments and convictions obtained.

These traditional measures, however, track activity only. They do not measure the impact or the effectiveness of Customs' drug interdiction efforts because they do not provide the necessary evidence of success or failure. During the course of our review, for example, several Customs officials made this point by noting that it is unclear whether an increase in seizures indicates that Customs is more effective or that the amount of smuggling has increased significantly.

In addition to traditional measures, Customs has developed eight nontraditional measures it will use in assessing the effectiveness of its drug strategy initiatives in its Fiscal Year 1996 Annual Plan. These measures include a reduction in the number of port runners and the ratio of seizures to examinations conducted for cargo and passengers. By applying these additional nontraditional measures, Customs is attempting to capture data that will provide an indication of the impact its interdiction efforts are having on drug smuggling.

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## GAO Customs' Traditional Measures of Effectiveness, FY 1995

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Traditional measure	Number	Amount of seizure
Seizures		
Cocaine	2,226	158,314 lbs.
Heroin	923	2,235 lbs.
Marijuana	10,214	642,013 lbs.
Arrests	8,065	N/A
Indictments	4,304	N/A
Convictions	4,262	N/A

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N/A: Not applicable.

Source: U.S. Customs Service.



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**Customs' Traditional  
Measures of Effectiveness,  
Fiscal Year 1995**

Customs continues to measure the results of its drug interdiction efforts by traditional measures—that is, by the number of seizures, arrests, indictments, and convictions.

For fiscal year 1995, Customs reported a total of 13,363 cocaine, heroin, and marijuana seizures. These seizures included 158,314 pounds of cocaine, 2,235 pounds of heroin, and 642,013 pounds of marijuana. In fiscal year 1995, Customs also reported a total of 8,065 arrests, 4,304 indictments, and 4,262 convictions related to drug violations.

According to Office of Investigations officials, Customs measures the effectiveness of its air program using an “Air Threat Index.” The index includes data on the number of detected air intrusions across U.S. borders and aircraft seizures. Customs reported that the index shows an estimated 80-percent reduction in general aviation drug smuggling across U.S. borders from 1982 to 1995.

**GAO**      **Status of Customs' Nontraditional  
Measures as of July 1996**

<b>Nontraditional measure</b>	<b>Status</b>
Reduction in number of port runners	Implemented
Ratio of seizures to examinations conducted for cargo	Baseline data under development
Ratio of seizures to examinations conducted for passengers	Baseline data under development
Shifts in smuggling trends	No action taken
Identification of new targets from source countries	No action taken
An increase in foreign country seizures	No action taken
Impact on smuggling organizations	No action taken
An increase in narcotics interdictions based upon expanded information exchanges	No action taken

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**Status of Customs'  
Nontraditional Measures as  
of July 1996**

Customs' Fiscal Year 1996 Annual Plan stated that it would begin to track the eight nontraditional measures in October 1995. Customs officials told us that port-runner data had been collected, and that they were using the data to measure their effectiveness in decreasing port running incidents.

As of July 1996, Customs had begun to develop baseline data for two additional measures—the ratio of seizures to cargo and passenger examinations. However, we found that no action had been taken to capture information on the five remaining measures listed in their annual plan. Customs officials told us that they anticipate refinement of these nontraditional measures as they gain experience in capturing and analyzing the data.

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GAO COMPLEX to Provide Data on Drug  
Violators

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Designed to measure compliance with all  
laws enforced by Customs

Intended to measure inspectors'  
effectiveness at targeting violators,  
including drug smugglers, and to compare  
results with random sampling

Intended to estimate the number of  
violations not detected

Implemented at major passenger ports

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**Compliance Examination  
(COMPEX) to Provide  
Data on Drug Violators**

Customs has developed a program intended to measure passenger compliance with all the laws it is responsible for enforcing, including drug laws. The program, Compliance Examination (COMPEX), requires a port to randomly examine a sample of passengers drawn from those who were not targeted for examination in routine passenger processing. These data are used to estimate the number of violations that pass through the port undetected. COMPEX data are then combined with the number of violations detected by routine, targeted examinations to create an estimate of the number of violations that occurred among the overall passenger population. COMPEX is designed to allow Customs to measure the effectiveness of targeting by comparing the results of targeted exams with the estimated rate of violations in the overall population of passengers.

As of June 1996, COMPEX had been implemented at major air and land border ports for use with passenger processing only. Customs has attempted to implement COMPEX at a cargo port. However, to date, it has not been successful. Customs officials told us that they lacked the necessary number of inspectors to perform the labor-intensive searches of cargo based on random selection without substantially reducing the number of examinations of high-risk cargo.

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# Miami Area Drug Interdiction Activities

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**GAO** Miami Area Locations Visited

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Miami International Airport

Miami Seaport

Miami SAC Office

Miami Aviation Branch

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**Miami Area Locations  
Visited**

In the Miami area, we observed drug interdiction programs and activities at the Miami International Airport and Miami Seaport cargo facility. We also reviewed the drug interdiction operations of the Miami SAC Office (including the marine unit) and aviation branch.

# GAO Miami International Airport

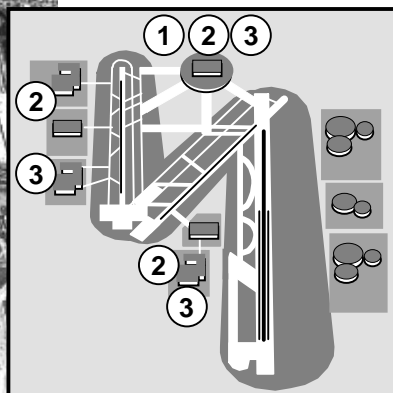
Aerial view of Miami International Airport



Areas and key elements

- ① Primary (terminals)
- ② Secondary
- ③ Other detection activities

Schematic of aerial view



Source: Metro Dade Aviation Department.



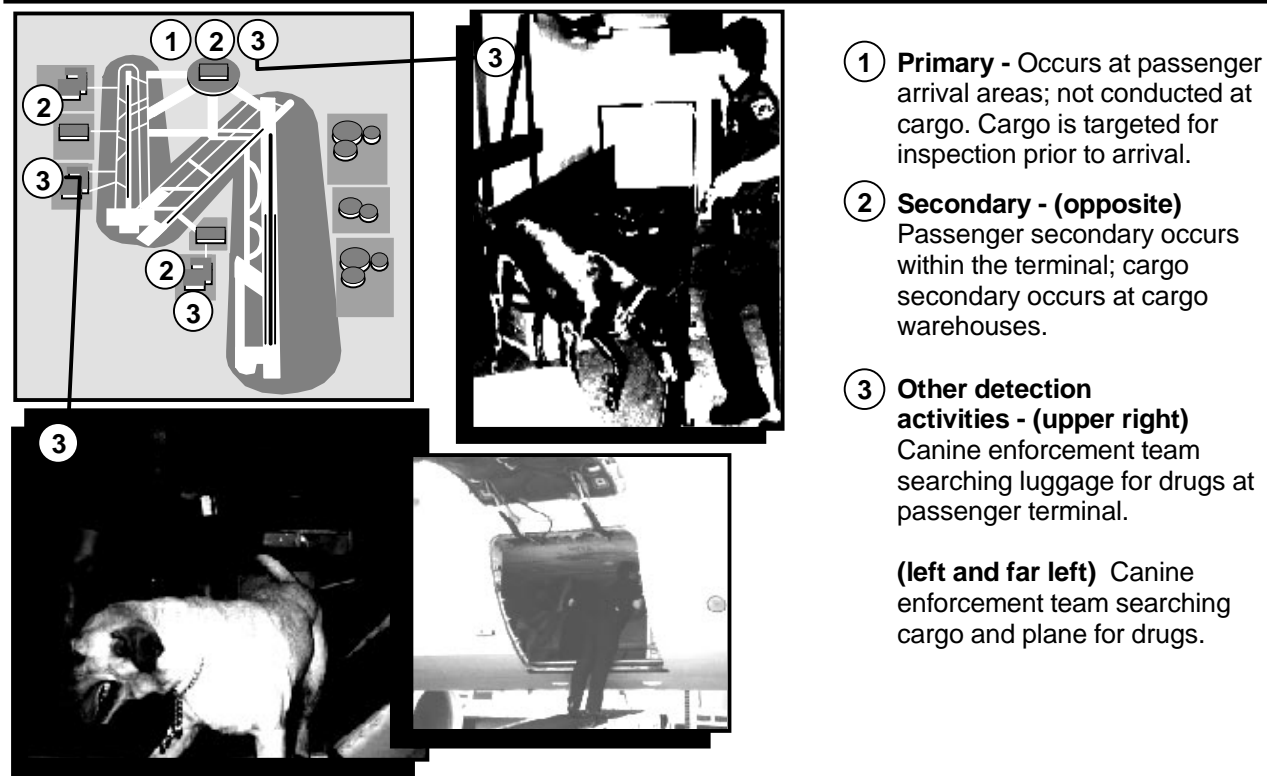
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**Miami International  
Airport**

Miami International Airport is the second busiest international airport in the nation: in fiscal year 1995, about 7.9 million international passengers arrived at the airport. It is open 7 days per week, 24 hours per day. Customs officials told us that about 120 of the 200 international flights arriving daily are considered high risk because they originate in countries such as Columbia, Peru, and Jamaica, which are known source or transit countries for drugs.

At Miami airport the major drug threats were smuggling by air passengers and “internal conspiracies” by airport and airline employees. For example, air passengers who smuggle drugs can conceal them internally, on their person, and in their luggage. Internal conspiracies occur when airline, airport, or warehouse employees off-load drugs from airplane compartments, cargo, baggage, and cargo warehouses.

## GAO Miami Airport Passenger and Cargo Key Elements



① **Primary** - Occurs at passenger arrival areas; not conducted at cargo. Cargo is targeted for inspection prior to arrival.

② **Secondary - (opposite)**  
Passenger secondary occurs within the terminal; cargo secondary occurs at cargo warehouses.

③ **Other detection activities - (upper right)**  
Canine enforcement team searching luggage for drugs at passenger terminal.

**(left and far left)** Canine enforcement team searching cargo and plane for drugs.

Source: GAO.

Drug interdiction activities at Miami International Airport passenger and cargo involve various key units and personnel that focus on the prevention of drug smuggling through the airport. (The photographs on the left illustrate some of these detection activities.) The Passenger Analytical Unit reviews and analyzes advance flight and passenger information and automated systems to target potential drug smugglers. The Manifest

Review Unit performs the same type of activity for cargo arriving at the airport. The unit reviews and analyzes cargo manifests and flight information to target aircraft and cargo for examination prior to its arrival.

Inspectors, using behavioral analysis and the results of prearrival reviews, determine whether to refer passengers to secondary for a more thorough examination. The examination may have included detailed questioning, searching of baggage, and searching of the passenger. Inspectors refer drug couriers and “swallowers” to agents from the Office of Investigation for further investigation.

Other drug detection activities include canine and rover teams who meet flights at the arrival gate and inspect and observe passengers in primary, in baggage claim, and at exit gates. On the basis of their analysis, inspectors could refer suspected drug smugglers to secondary. The teams also monitor the transfer of luggage to and from the aircraft to deter internal conspiracy activities.

Anti-Smuggling unit inspectors and canine enforcement teams assigned to air cargo perform drug interdiction activities at various airport locations. This includes inspecting aircraft and cargo as it is unloaded at airport and warehouse locations. Inspectors also review advance information to identify high-risk flights and cargo.

The Anti-Smuggling Unit also focuses its efforts on preventing internal conspiracies. For example, Anti-Smuggling and canine enforcement teams meet and board planes on arrival to inspect and monitor the unloading of cargo. They also conduct unannounced inspections (“sweeps”) of warehouses where cargo is stored.

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GAO Miami Airport Passenger and Cargo Drug  
Interdiction Resources as of May 1996

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Passenger

- 47 inspectors  
(rovers and Passenger  
Analytical Unit)
- 14 canine  
enforcement officers
- Equipment
- Technology

Cargo

- 35 inspectors  
(Anti-Smuggling  
Unit)
  - 15 canine  
enforcement officers
  - Equipment
  - Technology
- 

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**Miami Airport Passenger  
and Cargo Drug  
Interdiction Resources**

As of May 1996, 47 inspectors (rovers and Passenger Analytical Unit) and 14 canine enforcement officers were dedicated to drug interdiction in the passenger processing area at Miami International Airport.

In cargo operations, the Anti-Smuggling Unit had 35 inspectors and 15 canine enforcement officers who were dedicated to drug interdiction. Florida National Guard assistance increases the number and intensity of inspections Customs conducts.

In addition, Customs had additional inspectors who were responsible for routine passenger and cargo processing.

Inspectors at passenger and cargo use a variety of tools and technologies in drug interdiction efforts. These include database systems and probes (some designed by inspectors) to detect drugs in flowers and bulk material and mobile X-ray machines to examine luggage and cargo on-site. Canines are used extensively at both the passenger facility and cargo sites.

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GAO Miami Airport Passenger and Cargo  
Drug Interdiction Costs

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Passenger

- We estimated \$2 million in salary and equipment costs for rover teams and Passenger Analytical Unit in FY 1995

Cargo

- We projected \$2.2 million in salary and equipment costs for Anti-Smuggling Unit in FY 1996
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Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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Miami Airport Passenger  
and Cargo Drug  
Interdiction Costs

On the basis of data provided by Customs' Miami Airport officials, we estimated that the annual cost for the Passenger Analytical Unit and rover team activities at Miami Airport in fiscal year 1995 was about \$2 million.<sup>4</sup> According to Customs officials, these two units devoted 100 percent of their time to drug interdiction activities during fiscal year 1995. Of the inspectors assigned to passenger processing at the airport, only the Passenger Analytical Unit and rover teams were devoted exclusively to drug interdiction activities.

Using data provided by Customs Miami Airport officials, we projected the annual cost of the Anti-Smuggling Unit activities for fiscal year 1996 to be about \$2.2 million.<sup>5</sup> This annual figure was calculated using estimated Anti-Smuggling Unit costs covering the first 8 months of fiscal year 1996. Customs was unable to estimate fiscal year 1995 costs; prior to fiscal year 1996, the airport's Anti-Smuggling Unit budget was combined with the budgets of Anti-Smuggling Units at other Miami area ports and could not be separated.

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<sup>4</sup>This estimate includes base salary, benefits, overtime, night differential, and equipment costs related to Passenger Analytical Unit and rover operations. It does not include cost estimates related to facility use or to other passenger drug interdiction activities, such as primary or secondary inspections.

<sup>5</sup>This projection includes costs for salaries, benefits, overtime, night differential pay, services, supplies, and equipment. It does not include canine enforcement costs or facility costs.

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GAO Miami Airport Passenger and Cargo  
Operation Hard Line Enhancements

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Passengers

- Rover teams increased and hours realigned to better cover high-risk flights
- Increased inspectional coverage using overtime

Cargo

- Expanded activities of Anti-Smuggling Unit
  - Developing approaches to address internal conspiracies
-



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## Miami Airport Passenger and Cargo Operation Hard Line Enhancements

According to the Customs Port Director for Miami Airport, in fiscal year 1996 Miami Airport received \$563,000 in Operation Hard Line funds for new and enhanced passenger and cargo enforcement activities, \$545,000 of which was designated for overtime enforcement use.

As part of their Hard Line operations, Customs officials at Miami Airport reported that they had increased the number of inspectors assigned to rover teams. This increase was accomplished by reassigning some inspectors from passenger processing and by hiring additional inspectors.<sup>6</sup> Port officials told us that they were able to reassign inspectors from passenger processing following the airport's 1995 reconfiguration of the passenger processing area; this streamlining allowed Customs to process passengers more efficiently with fewer inspectors.

Port officials also told us that they realigned the hours rover teams work to better correspond with the arrival of high-risk flights. They said that the inspectional coverage of passenger operations in general was also increased through the use of Hard Line overtime funds.

In cargo operations, port officials said that they used Hard Line money to fund Anti-Smuggling Unit overtime activities to better target high-risk cargos. They said other Hard Line applications targeted the threat of internal conspiracies by airport and airline personnel. For example, port officials planned to install closed-circuit television to monitor airport and airline personnel.

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<sup>6</sup>These additional inspector positions were funded with passenger user fees.

**GAO Miami Airport Passenger and Cargo FY 1995 Drug Interdiction Measures**

Drug seized	Passengers		Cargo	
	Number of seizures	Pounds seized	Number of seizures	Pounds seized
Heroin	212	636	5	22
Cocaine	282	2,934	95	11,753
Marijuana	264	5,630	21	6,615
Hashish	73	164	1	40
Other	12	N/A	2	N/A
<b>Total</b>	<b>843</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>N/A</b>

N/A: Not applicable; "other" seizures were not reported in pounds.

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**Miami Airport Passenger  
and Cargo FY 1995 Drug  
Interdiction Measures**

During fiscal year 1995, Customs reported 843 drug seizures related to passenger operations. These included 212 heroin seizures (636 lbs.), 282 cocaine seizures (2,934 lbs.), 264 marijuana seizures (5,630 lbs.) and 73 hashish seizures (164 lbs.).

In cargo operations, Customs reported 124 drug seizures during fiscal year 1995. These included five heroin seizures (22 lbs.), 95 cocaine seizures (11,753 lbs.), 21 marijuana seizures (6,615 lbs.), and one hashish seizure (40 lbs.).

In addition, there were 14 other drug seizures in passenger (12) and cargo (2). These included seizures of steroids and Rohypnol, which were not reported in pounds.

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GAO COMPLEX for Miami International  
Airport Passengers

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From November 8, 1995, to May 31, 1996:

- 3 drug seizures out of 7,543 random exams of nontargeted passengers
  - Port officials estimated they were apprehending 25 percent of drug smugglers
  - Port officials estimated that 1 in 1,968 passengers was a drug smuggler
-

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COMPEX for Miami  
International Airport  
Passengers

Miami International Airport has been using COMPEX to assess passenger compliance since November 1995. For the period November 8, 1995, through May 31, 1996, Customs inspectors detected through normal targeted examinations 555 passengers smuggling drugs out of the 4.4 million people that passed through the airport during this period. Customs conducted an additional 7,543 random examinations of nontargeted passengers, as part of COMPEX, and detected 3 more drug smugglers.

On the basis of COMPEX results, Customs estimated that an additional 1,689 drug smugglers passed through the port undetected. Customs further estimated that they apprehended about 25 percent (555 of 2,244) of the drug smugglers during that 6-month period. Customs also estimated that only a small number of the 4.4 million passengers, 1 in 1,968 (2,244 out of 4.4 million), were probably smuggling drugs. Customs officials anticipated that this type of COMPEX data would allow them to establish a baseline from which to measure Customs' effectiveness in detecting drug smugglers over time.

# GAO Miami Seaport

Miami seaport dockside



Areas and key elements

- ① Primary
- ② Secondary



Source: GAO.

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## **Miami Seaport**

The Miami Seaport is the largest seaport in the South Florida area and the eighth largest in the United States. In fiscal year 1995, 11,448 commercial vessels and 331,219 cargo and container shipments passed through the Miami Seaport, of which approximately 3 million tons was incoming cargo. Seaport hours of operation are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Almost 80 percent of the cargo arriving in Miami, either at Dodge Island (the headquarters for Seaport operations) or along the Miami River, originates in narcotics source countries or transit points for drugs. Customs' seaport operations include a special enforcement team on the Miami River and its containerized cargo inspection facility on Dodge Island. The Dodge Island facility is a prototype and the national training facility for Customs inspectors who will be inspecting containerized cargo at seaports around the country.

## GAO Miami Seaport Cargo Key Elements



① **Primary** - Not conducted at the seaport; cargo is targeted for inspection prior to arrival.

② **Secondary** - May be conducted on the dock or at Customs' container inspection facility.

**(opposite)** A container of shredded paper undergoing a thorough inspection.

Source: GAO.



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## Miami Seaport Cargo Key Elements

Inspectors at the Miami Seaport target containerized cargo for examinations based on a variety of criteria, including the country of origin and information on the cargo that Customs receives prior to its arrival. The Cargo Analysis Research Investigative Team is responsible for analyzing cargo manifests, reviewing automated databases, and conducting investigations on the importer or the destination address in advance of a vessel's arrival.

The seaport's Anti-Smuggling Unit is also responsible for developing intelligence on suspect shipments as well as conducting all secondary inspections—intensive examinations—of containerized cargo. According to a supervisory inspector at the seaport, these intensive examinations are conducted by Customs inspectors, assisted by the Florida National Guard, because of concerns that shipping company employees, service employees, or vessel crews may be involved in internal conspiracies to smuggle drugs.

The Miami River Enforcement Team, working with the Coast Guard, targets, monitors, and conducts secondary inspections of selected commercial vessels along the Miami River, where a number of cocaine seizures from Haitian freighters have occurred. Canine enforcement officers and their dogs also assist inspectors at the seaport with cargo examinations in search of illegal drugs.

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GAO Miami Seaport Cargo Drug Interdiction  
Resources as of July 1996

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Personnel

- 42 Inspectors (Anti-Smuggling Unit and Miami River Enforcement Team)
- 4 canine enforcement officers

Equipment and technology

- Cargo X-ray machines
  - Portable contraband detector
  - Probes
- 

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**Miami Seaport Cargo Drug  
Interdiction Resources as  
of July 1996**

As of July 1996, a total of 95 Customs inspectors were assigned to the Miami Seaport for cargo inspections. Thirty-one inspectors were assigned to Anti-Smuggling Unit operations; 11 were assigned to the Miami River Enforcement Team; and 53 inspectors were assigned to other cargo inspection operations not directly related to drug enforcement activities. In addition, four canine enforcement officers also supported seaport inspection activities.

Inspectors at the seaport use a variety of tools and technologies to assist them in drug interdiction efforts. These include X-ray equipment that allows them to examine cargo by nonintrusive methods and an array of tools, such as busters and probes. For example, at the seaport inspectors were testing an ultrasonic transducer—a tool that can detect contraband inside a container of liquid.

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GAO Miami Seaport Cargo FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Cost

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Port officials estimated annual operating cost for drug interdiction in FY 1995 was \$1.7 million

(Facility costs were not included in this estimate)

Anti-Smuggling Unit and canine enforcement officers were devoted exclusively to drug interdiction

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Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**Miami Seaport Cargo FY  
1995 Drug Interdiction  
Cost**

Customs Seaport officials estimated that the annual cost for Anti-Smuggling Unit and Canine Enforcement Officer activities at the Miami Seaport in fiscal year 1995 was approximately \$1.7 million.

This estimate includes salary, benefits, overtime, supplies, equipment, and service costs related to canine enforcement officers and the Anti-Smuggling Unit. It does not include cost estimates related to facility use or to other cargo drug interdiction activities at the seaport.

Among Customs' personnel involved in cargo processing at the seaport, only the Anti-Smuggling Unit and the canine enforcement officers were devoted exclusively to drug interdiction.

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GAO Miami Seaport Cargo Operation Hard  
Line Enhancements

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Anti-Smuggling Unit expanded

Ongoing strategic problem-solving  
sessions were being conducted

Additional funding received:

- \$300,000 for overtime
  - \$80,000 for video surveillance equipment
-

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**Miami Seaport Cargo  
Operation Hard Line  
Enhancements**

According to the acting Port Director, enhancements attributable to Operation Hard Line include the following:

- The Anti-Smuggling Unit has been expanded. An additional eight inspectors and four canine enforcement officers have been added to conduct inspections of both commercial vessels and cargo entering Miami Seaport.
- Seaport personnel were conducting ongoing strategic problem-solving sessions aimed at disrupting and dismantling drug smugglers at the Port of Miami. As of July 1996, there had been several sessions dealing with the problem of internal conspiracies, but there were no results available to report.
- Additional funds for seaport operations have been received under Operation Hard Line. As of July 1996, \$300,000 had been received for overtime, and an additional \$80,000 had been received for the purchase of video surveillance equipment that is to be used to detect internal conspiracies.

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**GAO** Miami Seaport Cargo FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Measures

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Sea cargo/container seizures included:

- 29 seizures of cocaine (12,596 lbs.)
- 25 seizures of marijuana (75,608 lbs.)

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Source: U.S. Customs Service.



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**Miami Seaport Cargo FY  
1995 Drug Interdiction  
Measures**

In fiscal year 1995, Customs reported a total of 54 cocaine and marijuana cargo and container seizures by the Anti-Smuggling Unit (including the Miami River Enforcement Team) at the Miami Seaport. The 29 cocaine seizures totaled 12,596 pounds; and the 25 marijuana seizures totaled 75,608 pounds.

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GAO Miami SAC Office Key Elements

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Develop intelligence on drug smugglers

Investigate drug seizures made at ports

Develop and conduct investigations, including maritime investigations, in the Florida Keys, Everglades, and parts of the Caribbean

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Miami SAC Office Key  
Elements

The Miami SAC's area of responsibility covers the southeast coast of Florida from Fort Pierce in the north to Key West in the south. It includes the Miami Seaport, Miami International Airport, and other ports in the area, as well as between the ports. According to Customs' South Florida Narcotic Strategy for 1995-1996, South Florida has a target-rich environment for drug enforcement. Customs ranked sea cargo and containers, air cargo, and commercial aircraft among the highest threats for drug smuggling facing South Florida.

Miami SAC agents support area drug interdiction efforts by developing intelligence through informants and conducting criminal investigations of potential drug smugglers. Agents also investigate drug seizures made at the ports. They may also follow the smugglers to their destination in an attempt to apprehend more people or more drugs. Supervisory special agents in the Miami SAC office told us that their agents spend so much time on port cases that they have little time to initiate their own criminal investigations.

Miami SAC agents also conduct maritime investigations. According to Miami SAC officials, they have responsibility for a large expanse of waterways, including the Florida Keys, Everglades, and parts of the Caribbean. Marine enforcement officers assigned to the SAC office worked with special agents on maritime investigations. A recent Customs threat analysis included the following activities among the major maritime threats in South Florida: (1) drug smuggling on private vessels, (2) transfers from large boats (motherships) to smaller vessels off the Florida coast, and (3) floating bales of cocaine to be retrieved by speed boats.

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GAO Miami SAC Office Drug Interdiction  
Resources as of June 1996

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SAC Office

- 132 special agents authorized to conduct drug investigations

Marine program

- 41 marine enforcement officers
  - 27 vessels
- 

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**Miami SAC Office Drug  
Interdiction Resources as  
of June 1996**

As of June 1996, 225 special agents were assigned to the Miami SAC office, of which 132 were authorized to conduct drug investigations.

Forty-one marine enforcement officers were assigned to various enforcement groups that also included special agents.

As of June 1996, the Miami SAC had a total of 27 vessels in its fleet for marine operations. These included three types of vessels: (1) utility—used for patrolling the waterways; (2) interceptors—used to intercept high-speed smuggling boats; and (3) Blue Water—ocean-going large pleasure craft used for covert or undercover operations, including surveillance missions.

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**GAO** Miami SAC Office FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Budget

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Office of Investigations estimated that the total SAC budget for FY 1995 was \$31 million

We estimated that the FY 1995 SAC budget for drug investigations was \$17.6 million

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Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**Miami SAC Office FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Budget**

According to Customs' Office of Investigations, the Miami SAC Office's estimated budget for fiscal year 1995 was \$31 million.

Using data provided by Customs regarding the percentage of SAC time spent on drug investigations in fiscal year 1995, we estimated that \$17.6 million of the SAC Office's total budget was for drug interdiction. We included only those investigative hours directly attributable to Customs' drug smuggling investigations; we did not include investigative hours attributed to drug-related cases such as money laundering.

Our estimate assumes that all indirect and overhead costs for SAC Office operations can be evenly distributed to all investigative hours worked. Customs officials agreed with our methodology.

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GAO Miami SAC Office FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Measures

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Conducted 1,994 investigations

- 841 of these were drug cases (42 percent of total cases)
- Of the 841 drug cases, 52 percent resulted from drug seizures at the ports

Made 608 drug arrests

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Source: U.S. Customs Service.



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**Miami SAC Office FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction  
Measures**

During fiscal year 1995, the Miami SAC Office conducted a total of 1,994 investigations; 841 (42 percent) of these were drug cases. Of these 841 cases, 433 (52 percent) of the cases resulted from drug seizures made by inspectors at the air and sea ports. The remainder of cases were developed by the SAC office.

Miami SAC agents made 608 arrests related to drug investigations during fiscal year 1995.

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GAO Miami Aviation Branch Key Elements

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**Foreign interdiction**--intercept and track suspect aircraft for enforcement action by foreign host countries

**Domestic interdiction**--deter aircraft from smuggling drugs across U.S. border

**Other domestic support**--provide air support to Miami SAC, other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies

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Miami Aviation Branch Key  
Elements

The Miami Aviation Branch's primary objectives were:

- Foreign interdiction—to intercept and track suspect aircraft in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America for enforcement action by foreign host countries and provide tactical training on drug interdiction to foreign officers.
- Domestic interdiction—to maintain airborne intercept, tracking, and apprehension response capability to deter the use of aircraft for the smuggling of drugs into the United States. The Miami branch is responsible for interdicting smugglers crossing the South Florida border and for patrolling areas outside the United States that include the air space north of Cuba, the Bahamas, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.
- Other domestic support—to provide air support to the Miami SAC, other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. This included aerial surveillance, photo reconnaissance, and air security support.

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**GAO** Miami Aviation Branch Drug  
Interdiction Resources as of June 1996

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**Personnel**

- 74 (pilots, air interdiction officers, and management and support staff)

**Aircraft**

- 8 airplanes
- 4 helicopters

**Cessna Citation II**



**Sikorsky  
Black Hawk helicopter**



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Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**Miami Aviation Branch**  
**Drug Interdiction**  
**Resources as of June 1996**

As of June 1996, the Miami Aviation Branch employed 74 personnel, including 41 pilots, 18 air interdiction officers, and 15 management and support staff. SAC officials told us that Customs' pilots and air interdiction officers divide their time between developing intelligence on airborne smuggling and flying domestic and foreign interdiction missions. The Branch also is responsible for supporting and coordinating its activities with the Miami SAC office.

The Miami Aviation Branch has a total of 12 aircraft available for missions, including 4 Cessna Citation II interceptors and 2 Sikorsky UH-60 Black Hawk apprehension helicopters. One Citation and one Black Hawk are kept on 24-hour standby to respond to the Domestic Air Interdiction Command Center alerts.

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GAO Miami Aviation Branch FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Cost

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Estimated FY 1995 expenditures were  
\$8.3 million

Customs' Budget Office estimated that  
95 percent of this cost was related to  
counterdrug activities; using this  
percentage, we calculated the total drug  
interdiction cost to be \$7.9 million

Estimated cost includes salaries,  
expenses, operations, and maintenance

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Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**Miami Aviation Branch FY  
1995 Drug Interdiction  
Cost**

According to the Customs Air Interdiction Division, the estimated total expenditures of Miami Aviation Branch operations for fiscal year 1995 were \$8.3 million.

For Office of National Drug Control Policy reporting purposes, Customs' Budget Office estimated that 95 percent of Air Interdiction Division expenditures were related to counterdrug activities during fiscal year 1995. Using this percentage, we estimated fiscal year 1995 drug interdiction costs for the Miami Aviation Branch to be \$7.9 million.

Both total and drug interdiction cost estimates include funding amounts from several appropriation accounts, including the salaries and expenses and operations and maintenance accounts.

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GAO Miami Aviation Branch FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Measures

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2,763 mission flight hours:

- 7 percent foreign interdiction
- 38 percent domestic interdiction
- 55 percent other domestic support

Domestic interdiction launches: 89

Aviation Branch seizures:

- Domestic: 595 lbs. of marijuana
  - Domestic support
    - 5,097 lbs. of cocaine
    - 1,644 lbs. of marijuana
- 

Source: U.S. Customs Service.



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**Miami Aviation Branch FY  
1995 Drug Interdiction  
Measures**

In fiscal year 1995, the Miami Aviation Branch logged a total of 2,763 mission flight hours. Mission hours included those hours in which personnel were actually engaged in either foreign or domestic interdiction or support. Of the 2,763 mission flight hours recorded by Miami Aviation Branch personnel, 7 percent were spent on foreign interdiction support, 38 percent on domestic interdiction activities, and 55 percent on other domestic support activities, such as supporting SAC operations.

During fiscal year 1995, Branch personnel conducted 89 domestic interdiction launches in response to Domestic Air Interdiction Command Center alerts.

Excluding seizures resulting from foreign interdiction activities,<sup>7</sup> the Miami Aviation Branch reported seizing 595 pounds of marijuana. It also assisted other law enforcement agencies in seizures of 5,097 pounds of cocaine and 1,644 pounds of marijuana.

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<sup>7</sup>Foreign interdiction activities are supported nationally by aircraft and air crews from varying aviation branches. Therefore, the Air Program data collection and reporting system does not attribute foreign seizures to specific domestic aviation branches.

# San Diego Area Drug Interdiction Activities

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GAO San Diego Locations Visited

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San Ysidro border crossing

Otay Mesa Commercial Facility

San Diego SAC Office

San Diego Aviation Branch

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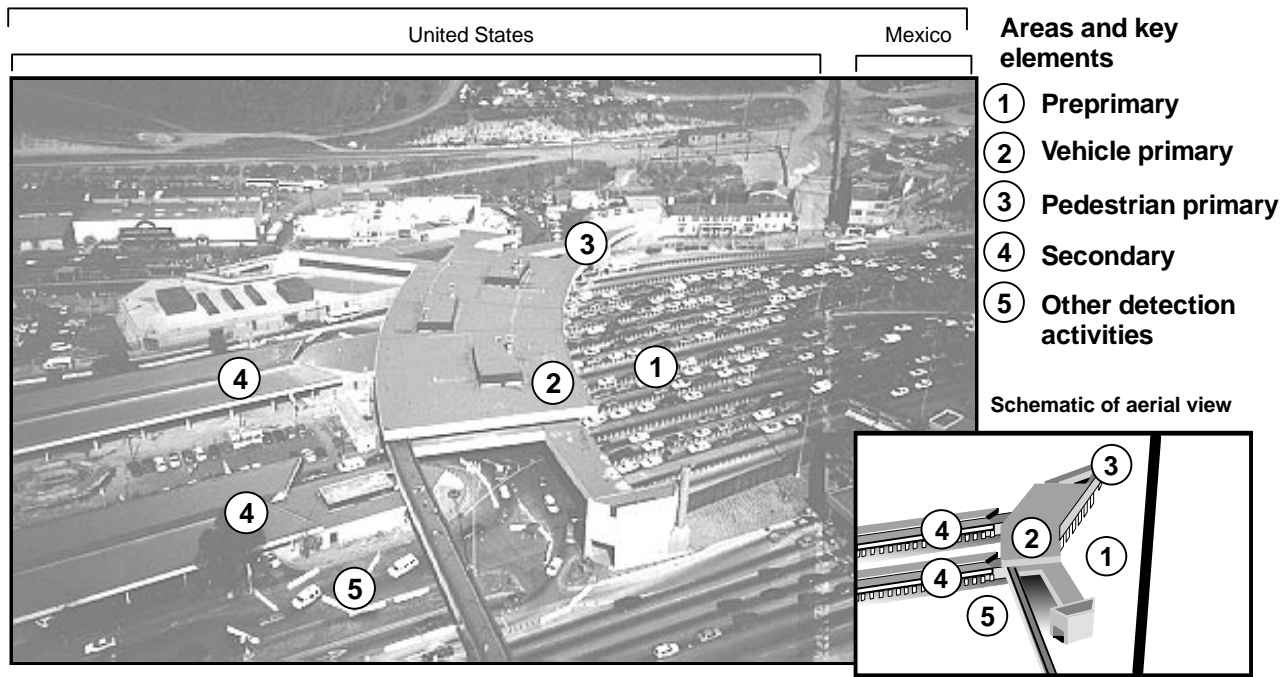
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**Customs' San Diego Area  
Locations Visited**

In the San Diego area, we observed drug interdiction programs and activities at the San Ysidro border crossing (passenger processing) and the Otay Mesa Commercial Inspection Facility (cargo processing). We also reviewed the drug interdiction operations of the SAC office (including the marine unit) and the aviation branch.

# GAO San Ysidro Border Crossing

Aerial view of San Ysidro



Source: GAO.

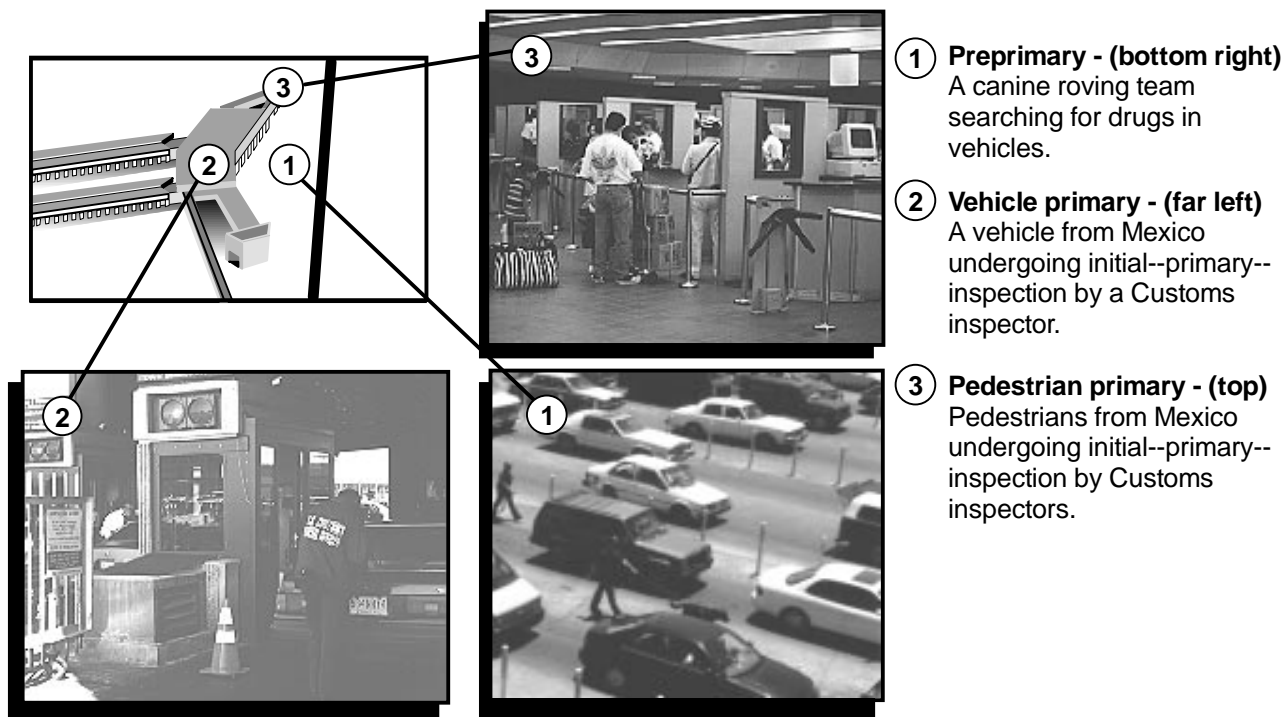
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**San Ysidro Border  
Crossing**

San Ysidro is the largest and busiest land border port in the world. In fiscal year 1995, almost 52 million people passed through the 24-hour port of entry; they arrived in vehicles (14.8 million) and buses (74,000) or as pedestrians (8.2 million).

The port's proximity, visibility, and accessibility to Mexico provide opportunities for drugs to be smuggled into the United States. The smuggling threat includes drugs concealed in the trunks or hidden compartments of vehicles and drugs carried by pedestrians crossing the border.

# GAO San Ysidro Preprimary and Primary Key Elements



Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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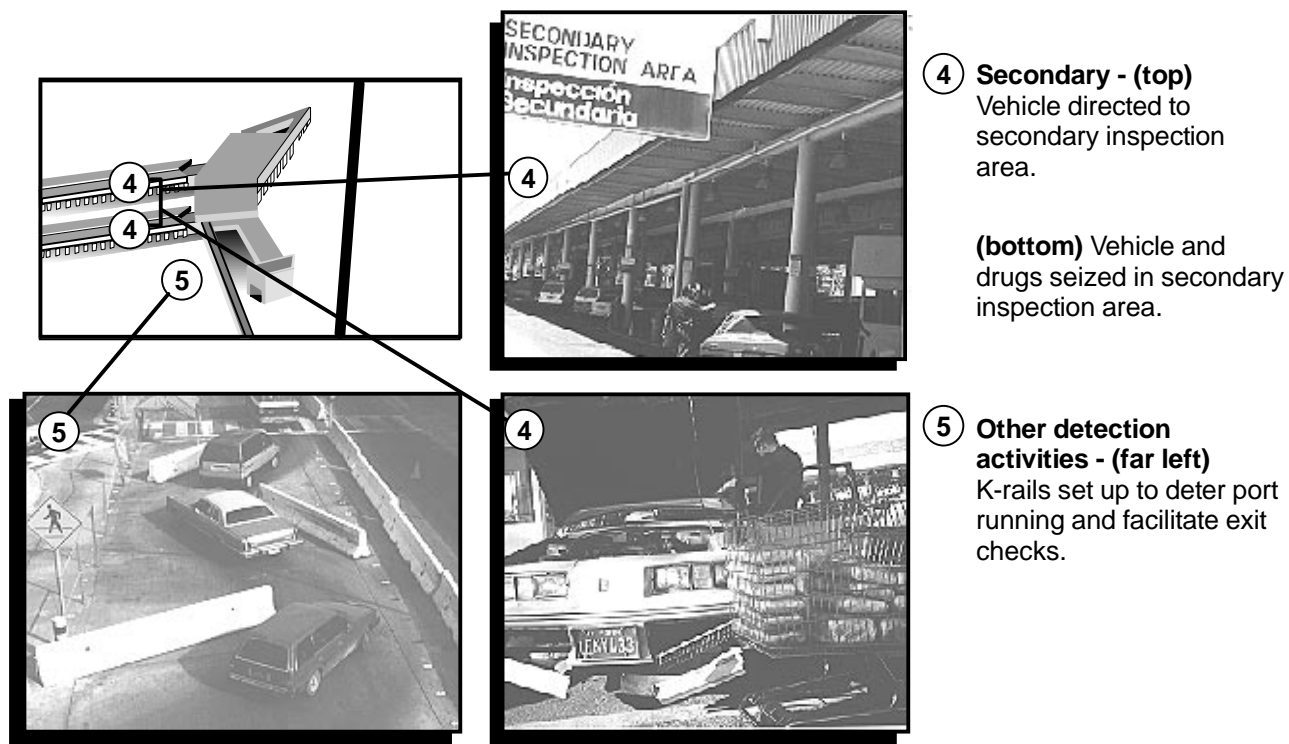
## San Ysidro Preprimary and Primary Key Elements

Targeting suspected drug smugglers among the millions of border crossers is difficult. Unlike airport passenger and cargo processing, where Customs may have advance information, Customs generally does not know who will be crossing the land border.

Preprimary activities include canine roving and inspectional roving, where officers walk through pedestrian and vehicle traffic targeting persons who they believe are potential drug couriers or fit current smuggling patterns. Canine roving consists of a Canine Enforcement Officer, supported by other canine enforcement officers and inspectors, working the canine to detect drugs in vehicles entering the United States before they reach primary. Inspectional roving consists of inspectors whose purpose is to target profile vehicles and occupants for secondary inspection, respond to preprimary alerts, target vehicles smuggling undocumented persons, and detect potential port runners.

Entry into the United States is granted by either Customs or Immigration and Naturalization Service inspectors, who share primary inspection responsibilities at the port. To attempt to interdict drug smuggling, inspectors at both the vehicle and the pedestrian facilities employ various techniques such as interviewing, behavioral analysis, document inspection, Treasury Enforcement Communications System queries, and when appropriate, X-rays of hand-carried items. Inspectors at vehicle primary also identify unusual vehicle characteristics that may caused them to refer the driver, any passengers, and the vehicle to secondary inspection.

# GAO San Ysidro Secondary and Other Key Elements



Source: (left) U.S. Customs Service. (right, top and bottom) GAO.



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**San Ysidro Secondary and  
Other Key Elements**

Pedestrians selected for secondary inspection are escorted to a secure area where they are questioned and possibly searched. Vehicle secondary include an inspection for drugs of both the vehicle and its occupants. Vehicles are searched by a canine enforcement officer and a canine; an inspector performs a seven-point inspection using various equipment, such as a buster.

Other drug detection activities include “exit checks.” Using observational skills, behavioral analysis, and experience, inspectors examine passengers and vehicles as they pass through the K-rails<sup>8</sup> and exit the inspection facility. This activity provides the inspectors with a final opportunity to prevent drugs from being smuggled into the United States.

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<sup>8</sup>Concrete barriers placed in a zig-zag pattern in lanes after primary to deter potential drug runners.

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GAO San Ysidro Drug Interdiction  
Resources as of May 1996

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Personnel

- 149 Inspectors
- 25 canine enforcement officers

Equipment and technology

- Portable contraband detectors
  - Mobile X-ray machines
  - Fiber-optic scopes
- 

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**San Ysidro Drug  
Interdiction Resources as  
of May 1996**

As of May 1996, San Ysidro had 149 inspectors and 25 canine enforcement officers responsible for inspecting people and vehicles entering the United States at the port. California National Guard personnel assist them in drug interdiction activities.

They used a variety of drug interdiction equipment and technology including databases, hand tools to dismantle vehicles, fiber-optic scopes, portable contraband detectors to locate hidden contraband in vehicles, hand-held radios, and “stop sticks” (a spiked rod that deflates the tires of an oncoming vehicle). A mobile X-ray van is used at secondary inspections for examining large or heavy items. Canines are used in all aspects of drug interdiction at the port.

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GAO San Ysidro FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Cost

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Port officials estimated annual operating cost for drug interdiction in FY 1995 was \$12.5 million

Estimated cost includes salary, benefits, overtime, equipment, and facility costs

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Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**San Ysidro FY 1995 Drug  
Interdiction Cost**

Port officials estimated that the annual operating cost for drug interdiction activities at San Ysidro in fiscal year 1995 was \$12.5 million. This estimate includes salary, benefits, and total overtime costs for passenger inspectors, canine enforcement officers, and support staff. It also includes estimated facility expenditures related to rent, communications, equipment, utilities, and overhead.

Customs' estimate assumed that most of San Ysidro's operational costs were directly related to the drug interdiction mission. Port officials applied the following percentages to each category of costs: inspectors, 95 percent; canine enforcement officers, 100 percent; support staff, 75 percent; and Operation Hard Line overtime, 100 percent. Canine enforcement costs include operations and support costs related to Otay Mesa canine operations and kennel, veterinarian, and vehicle costs related to ports serviced by San Ysidro.

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GAO San Ysidro Operation Hard Line  
Enhancements

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Strategic problem solving led to installation  
of permanent bollards and K-rails

Enforcement activities increased

Special enforcement teams developed to  
identify and target drug smuggling trends  
and activities

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**San Ysidro Operation Hard  
Line Enhancements**

According to San Ysidro's Operations Chief, enhancements attributable to Operation Hard Line included the following:

- Used "strategic problem solving," a method by which Customs and other border agencies cooperatively developed new approaches to address border violence, port running, and drug interdiction. For example, as a result of strategic problem solving, Customs installed permanent bollards and K-rails to manage traffic flow and deter port running.
- Increased the number of enforcement activities conducted, such as canine and inspectional roving and block blitzes.
- Established special enforcement teams that, through seizure analysis and review of intelligence information, developed information on drug smuggling activities and trends. This information was used to target potential smugglers.

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GAO San Ysidro FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Measures

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1,614 seizures, including:

- 34 heroin seizures (33 lbs.)
- 31 cocaine seizures (252 lbs.)
- 1,516 marijuana seizures (108,154 lbs.)

38-percent decline in port runners

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Source: U.S. Customs Service.



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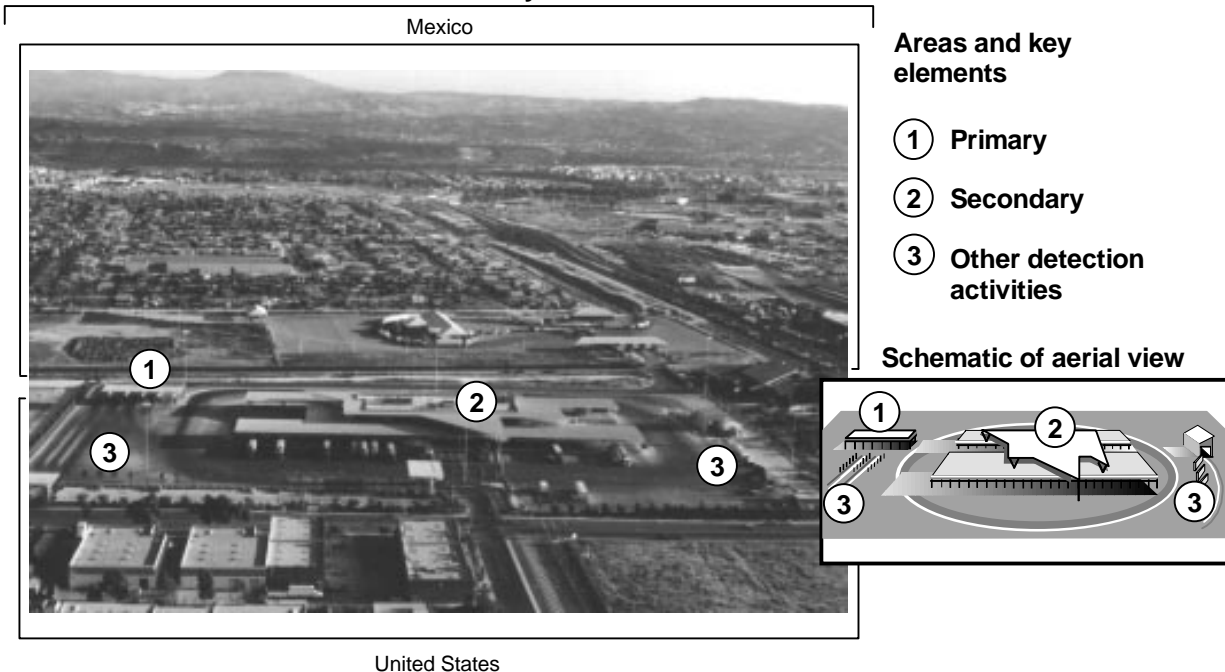
**San Ysidro FY 1995 Drug  
Interdiction Measures**

During fiscal year 1995, Customs reported making 1,614 drug seizures at San Ysidro. These included 34 heroin seizures (33 lbs.), 31 cocaine seizures (252 lbs.), and 1,516 marijuana seizures (108,154 lbs.).

As a result of Hard Line efforts, San Ysidro reported a 38-percent reduction in the number of port runners in fiscal year 1995 over fiscal year 1994. Using port runner data for the first 8 months of fiscal year 1996, we projected that the number of port runners could decline by approximately 76 percent from fiscal year 1995 to the end of fiscal year 1996.

# GAO Otay Mesa Commercial Facility

Aerial view of Otay Mesa



Source: U.S. Customs Service.

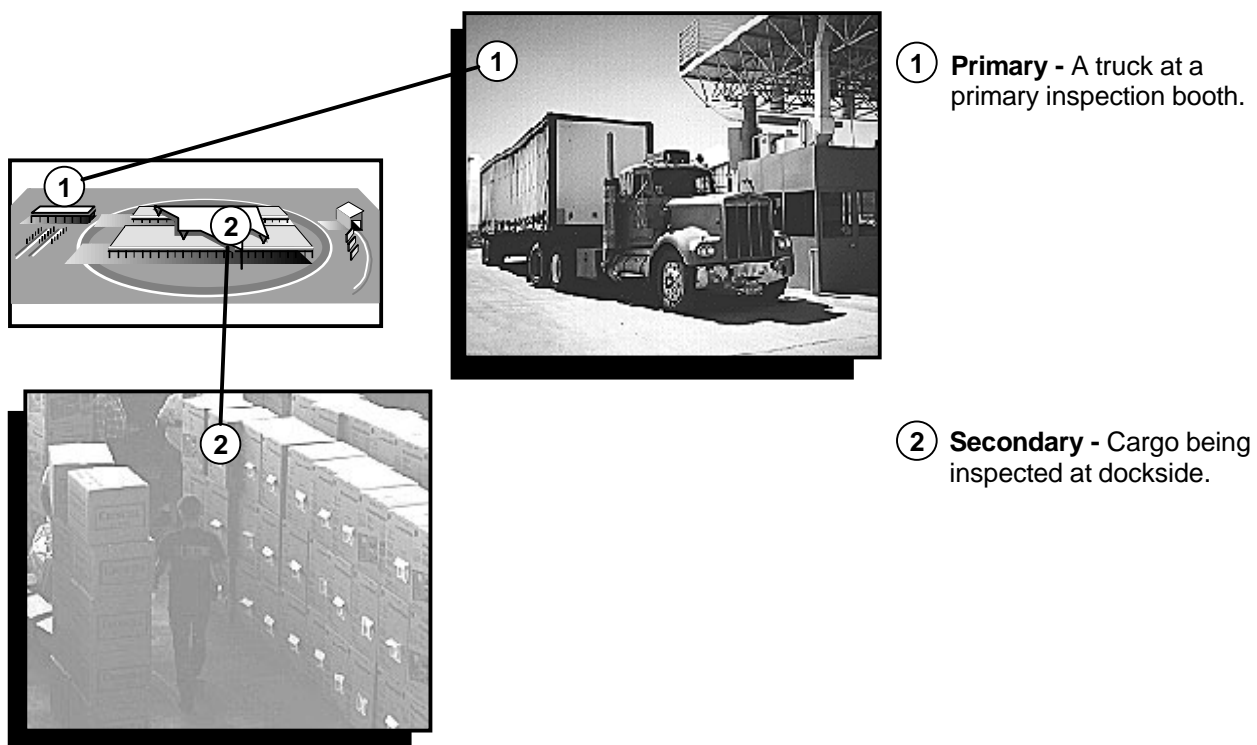
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**Otay Mesa Commercial  
Facility**

Otay Mesa is a commercial inspection facility where about 463,000 trucks (215,000 laden and 248,000 empty) entered in fiscal year 1995. Otay Mesa is open from 6:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, and from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on weekends for empty vehicles. The general entry of goods and merchandise occurs from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday and 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. The facility has dock spaces for enforcement examinations and inspections of fruits and vegetables; it has the only truck X-ray facility in the nation.

The facility's proximity to Mexico, its visibility, and its accessibility provide opportunities for drugs to be smuggled into the United States. Smugglers can quickly move drugs in cargo or empty conveyances to the facility if a perceived opportunity exists, such as when the truck X-ray machine is not working.

## GAO Otay Mesa Commercial Primary and Secondary Key Elements



Source: (bottom left) U.S. Customs Service. (upper right) GAO.

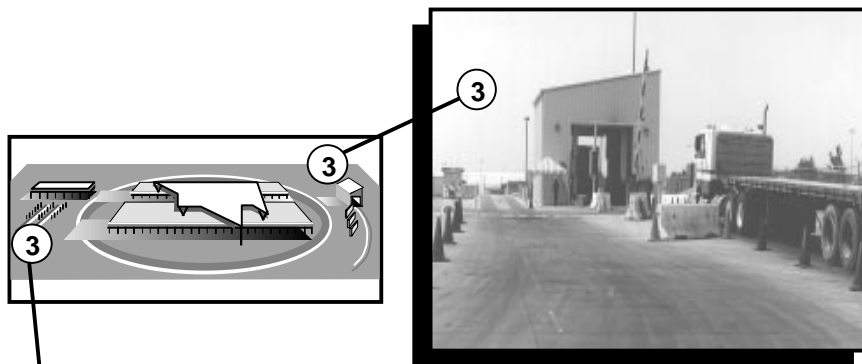
There may be little, if any, lead time between the receipt of an itemized cargo list and the arrival of the cargo at the facility; whenever possible, advance cargo information is analyzed prior to its arrival. The Document Analysis Unit and Cargo Analysis Research Investigative Team use the advance cargo information, along with other data, to target specific cargo for secondary inspection.

Cargo enters the port under different entry programs. In one, cargo information is prefiled with Customs before it arrives at the port. The pre-filing of information allows Customs to analyze and target cargo for secondary inspection before its arrival. A second way cargo enters the port is through the Line Release program. Line Release was designed to expedite the release and tracking of low-risk, high-volume shipments. Under this program, Customs prescreens the manufacturer, importer, broker, and shipper in an attempt to ensure that they are low risk for drug smuggling; the port also requires participants to pass five intensive examinations and meet a minimum requirement of 50 shipments per year.

Inspectors at primary use computer-generated information and intelligence, behavioral analysis, a cursory document review, and visual inspection of the conveyance to determine drug smuggling risk. Unless referred to secondary for an intensive drug examination or caught in other drug detection activities, laden or empty conveyances, regardless of the type of entry, proceed for further processing or to the exit gate.

Inspectors perform various levels of drug enforcement examinations on conveyances caught in block blitzes or those referred to secondary. For conveyances that have been identified through intelligence alerts as a high risk for drug smuggling, a “100 percent” examination is performed. Inspectors conduct less intensive examinations when they have no prior intelligence information. For enforcement examinations, inspectors use a variety of tools and technology such as busters, fiber-optic scopes, and a pallet and truck X-ray.

# GAO Otay Mesa Commercial Other Key Elements



③ **Other detection activities - (opposite)**  
A truck waiting to be X-rayed.



**(far left)** Canine enforcement team inspecting trucks during a block blitz.

**(left)** Customs inspector using a buster.

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**Otay Mesa Commercial  
Other Key Elements**

Other detection activities include pre- and postprimary examinations. They include block blitzes, canine enforcement operations, rover dock sweeps, and targeted and random referrals to the truck X-ray system.

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GAO Otay Mesa Commercial Drug  
Interdiction Resources as of May 1996

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Personnel

- 96 Inspectors
- 13 canine enforcement officers

Equipment and technology

- Truck and pallet X-ray machines
  - Tanker scale
  - Portable contraband detectors
- 

Source: U.S. Customs Service.



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Otay Mesa Commercial  
Drug Interdiction  
Resources as of May 1996

As of May 1996, the Otay Mesa Commercial Facility had 96 inspectors and 13 canine enforcement officers responsible for inspecting persons, conveyances, and cargo that enter the United States through the port. California National Guard personnel assist them in drug interdiction activities.

Equipment and technologies that were available for drug interdiction activities included database systems, hand-held radios, busters, fiber-optic scopes to examine gas tanks and tanker trucks, range finders, and pallet and mobile X-ray systems. The Otay Mesa facility has the only truck X-ray system in the nation. Canines are used for all types of drug interdiction activities including dock sweeps and block blitzes. In addition, inspectors use a "cherry picker," a mobile crane that allows an inspector to examine the tops of trucks. Customs also uses a truck scale in an attempt to detect drugs smuggled in empty tankers by identifying discrepancies between the tanker's actual weight and the known standard weight.

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GAO Otay Mesa Commercial  
FY 1995 Drug Interdiction Cost

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Port officials estimated annual operating cost for FY 1995 was \$9.5 million

Cost estimate includes salary, benefits, overtime, equipment, and facility costs

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Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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Otay Mesa Commercial  
Fiscal Year 1995 Drug  
Interdiction Cost

Port officials estimated that the annual operating cost for drug interdiction activities at Otay Mesa in fiscal year 1995 was \$9.5 million. This estimate includes salary, benefits, and total overtime costs for cargo inspectors; Fines, Penalties and Forfeiture staff; Tariff and Trade staff; and support staff. It also includes estimated facility expenditures related to rent, communications, equipment, utilities, and various overhead expenses.

Customs' estimate assumed that most of Otay Mesa's operational costs were directly related to the drug interdiction mission. Port officials applied the following percentages to each category of costs: inspectors, 95 percent; support staff, 75 percent; Fines, Penalties and Forfeiture, 99 percent; Tariff and Trade, 50 percent; and Operation Hard Line overtime, 100 percent. Costs associated with canine enforcement activities at Otay Mesa were included in costs for San Ysidro, where the program is administered.

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GAO Otay Mesa Commercial Operation  
Hard Line Enhancements

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Increased and intensified enforcement activities such as block blitzes and inspector dock roving

Enforcement Rotation Teams created to enhance ability to interdict drugs

Land Border Carrier Initiative required Line Release participants to use approved firms and drivers

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**Otay Mesa Commercial  
Operation Hard Line  
Enhancements**

Port officials increased and intensified the number of enforcement activities, particularly during busy peak traffic periods. For example, they told us they performed more block blitzes, drug-intensive examinations, exit gate documentation reviews, and inspector dock roving to identify conveyances for drug examinations and referrals to the truck X-ray system.

An Enforcement Rotation team was established to enhance Customs' ability to interdict drugs. The team, a self-directed, voluntary team, operates on a 4-week rotation. It consists of a canine team and inspectors from Otay Commercial, Tecate, and San Diego Airport/Seaport. The team targets various commodities, drivers, carriers, and conveyances involved in importing and exporting commercial shipments and looks for potential drug smuggling activities.

According to Customs, the Land Border Carrier Initiative strengthened the Line Release program by requiring participants to use Customs-approved trucking firms and drivers. The approval process requires trucking firms to provide Customs with information on the company and its employees and to create antismuggling safeguards at their warehouses and lots. Customs conducts site surveys at manufacturers' and importers' premises to review and approve their antismuggling safeguards.

## GAO Otay Mesa: Vehicles Involved in Special Enforcement Operations 3/11-- 6/11/96

	Line Release	Non-Line Release	Empty vehicles	Total vehicles
Vehicles through primary	24,251	43,775	67,244	135,270
Percentage of vehicles through primary	17.9 %	32.4%	49.7%	100%
Vehicles involved in special enforcement operations	4,374	4,876	21,385	30,635
Percentage of vehicles in special enforcement operations	18%	11.1%	31.8%	22.7%

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

Over the past 2 years, Customs' Line Release program has received considerable media attention, most of it focused on the program's potential vulnerability to drug smuggling. Critics have alleged that the Line Release program allows vehicles to enter the United States from Mexico without inspection. Line Release was designed to expedite the release and

tracking of high-volume, low-risk shipments by prescreening shippers, manufacturers, brokers, and importers.

We found that Line Release vehicles were subject to the same special enforcement operations as non-Line Release vehicles, and were, in fact, inspected more frequently through these operations than were non-Line Release vehicles. Special enforcement operations include preprimary, postprimary block blitzes, and secondary express.<sup>9</sup> To determine the degree to which Line Release and non-Line Release vehicles were subject to special enforcement operations at Otay Mesa, we asked port officials to track the number of vehicles—laden Line Release, laden non-Line Release, and empty—that passed through primary each day over a 3-month period. We also asked that they track the number of vehicles subject to special enforcement operations over the same period.

According to Otay Mesa officials, from March 11, 1996, through June 11, 1996, a total of 135,270 vehicles passed through primary; of these, 24,251 (17.9 percent) were laden Line Release Vehicles; 43,775 (32.4 percent) were laden non-Line Release vehicles; and the remaining 67,244 (49.7 percent) were empty vehicles. Of the 135,270 vehicles that passed through primary, 30,635 (22.7 percent) were inspected in special enforcement operations. Of the 24,251 laden Line Release vehicles that passed through primary, 4,374 (18 percent) were involved in special enforcement operations compared to 4,876 laden non-Line Release vehicles (11.1 percent).

Of the 67,244 empty vehicles that passed through primary, 21,385 (31.8 percent) were subject to special enforcement operations. Customs allowed laden vehicles to enter Otay Mesa only between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on weekends; empty vehicles were allowed to enter the port during all hours of operation. This explains why a higher percentage of empty vehicles compared to laden vehicles were subject to special enforcement operations during the 3-month period.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Secondary express operations are a form of block blitz in which the vehicle continues to move forward at a very slow rate of speed while inspectors and canine enforcement officers perform an inspection. Port officials told us they perform very few secondary express operations at Otay Mesa because of safety concerns.

<sup>10</sup>We did not verify the data provided by port officials, although we did perform limited spot checks on their collection procedures and found them to be accurate. The Port Director reported that the 3-month period covered by the data was typical for that time of year.

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GAO Otay Mesa Commercial FY 1995 Drug  
Interdiction Measures

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9 seizures in FY 1995:

- 1 cocaine seizure (28.5 lbs.)
- 8 marijuana seizures (5,447 lbs.)

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Source: U.S. Customs Service.



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**Otay Mesa Commercial FY  
1995 Drug Interdiction  
Measures**

During fiscal year 1995, Customs reported making 9 drug seizures, 1 cocaine seizure (28.5 lbs.) and 8 marijuana seizures (5,447 lbs.).

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GAO San Diego SAC Office Key Elements

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Develop intelligence on drug smugglers

Investigate drug seizures made at ports such as San Ysidro and Otay Mesa

Develop investigations, including maritime investigations, along the waters off San Diego

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The San Diego SAC office is responsible for the territory along the U.S.-Mexico border, from the Pacific ocean to the Arizona border, and into Riverside, Imperial, and San Diego counties. Because of their direct proximity to the border, San Diego and Imperial counties are the first domestic stops for illegal drugs entering the United States via the Southwest border.

San Diego SAC agents said they support area drug interdiction efforts by developing intelligence, including the use of informants, and conducting criminal investigations of potential drug smugglers. Agents also respond to drug seizures made at the ports. They may also follow the smugglers to their destination in an attempt to apprehend additional suspects or to seize additional drugs. The San Diego SAC told us that agents spend as much as 90 percent of their time on port cases. He said that port cases average about 12 per day and were running as high as 20 new cases per day at San Ysidro alone. As a result, agents do not have as much time as they need to initiate or develop criminal investigations of drug smugglers.

San Diego's marine unit provides assistance to SAC offices along the West Coast, including the Los Angeles SAC. The marine unit routinely develops intelligence, targets suspect smuggling boats, and patrols the waters off San Diego. Customs SAC officials told us that they occasionally use radar to attempt to track boats coming up from Mexico. Small, inflatable rubber rafts called "Zodiacs" have been frequently used by smugglers because they cannot be detected by radar.

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GAO San Diego SAC Office Resources as of  
June 1996

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SAC Office

- 108 special agents authorized to conduct drug investigations

Marine program

- 4 vessels
- 

Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**San Diego SAC Office  
Resources as of June 1996**

As of June 1996, the San Diego SAC office had 120 special agents, of which 108 were authorized to conduct drug investigations.

Operation Hard Line provided funding for the temporary assignment of eight marine enforcement officers and one intelligence analyst to San Diego for 90-day tours of duty.

As of June 1996, the marine program had four vessels available for interdiction activities: one Blue Water vessel, one interceptor, and two utility vessels.

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**GAO San Diego SAC Office FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Budget**

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Office of Investigations estimated total  
FY 1995 SAC budget was \$10.4 million

We estimated the FY 1995 SAC budget  
for drug investigations was \$7.9 million

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Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**San Diego SAC Office FY  
1995 Drug Interdiction  
Budget**

According to Customs' Office of Investigations, the San Diego SAC Office's estimated total budget for fiscal year 1995 was \$10.4 million.

Using data provided by Customs on the percentage of SAC time spent on drug investigations in fiscal year 1995, we estimated that \$7.9 million of the SAC office's total budget was for drug interdiction. We included only those investigative hours directly attributable to Customs' drug smuggling investigations; we did not include investigative hours attributed to drug-related cases such as money laundering.

Our estimate assumed that all indirect and overhead costs for SAC office operations could be evenly distributed to all investigative hours worked. Customs agreed with our methodology.

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GAO San Diego SAC Office FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Measures

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SAC Office:

- 2,488 drug cases
- 2,555 drug arrests

Marine program: 6 seizures

- 2 cocaine seizures (26,875 lbs.)
  - 4 marijuana seizures (5,721 lbs.)
- 

Source: U.S. Customs Service.



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**San Diego SAC Office FY  
1995 Drug Interdiction  
Measures**

According to fiscal year 1995 data, the San Diego SAC Office conducted a total of 2,488 drug investigations. Of these investigations, 2,217 were cases referred by the ports. Of the total number of port-referred cases, 2,102 (95 percent) involved marijuana seizures, of which 1,657 (79 percent) were in amounts under 100 pounds.

The San Diego marine unit reported a total of 6 drug seizures. These seizures included 2 cocaine seizures totaling 26,875 pounds and 4 marijuana seizures totaling 5,721 pounds. In one case, over 12 tons of cocaine were seized from a vessel.

San Diego SAC agents made a total of 2,555 drug arrests.

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GAO San Diego Aviation Branch Key  
Elements

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Foreign interdiction--intercept and track suspect aircraft for enforcement action by foreign host countries

Domestic interdiction--deter aircraft from smuggling drugs across the U.S. border

Other domestic support--provide air support to San Diego SAC, other West Coast SACs, and other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies

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## San Diego Aviation Branch Key Elements

The San Diego Aviation Branch (including the Riverside Aviation Unit at Riverside, California) had three primary responsibilities:

- Foreign interdiction—intercept and track suspect aircraft in Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central and South America for enforcement action by foreign host countries and provide tactical training on drug interdiction to foreign officers.

San Diego Aviation Branch personnel support foreign operations by flying missions in Latin America on rotating 30-day assignments. These missions included flights to monitor and detect smuggling activities around Latin America and the Caribbean.

- Domestic interdiction—maintain airborne intercept, tracking, and apprehension response capability to deter the use of aircraft for the smuggling of drugs into the United States.
- Other domestic support—provide air support to West Coast SAC offices; other federal agencies (particularly the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms); and state and local law enforcement agencies. The Aviation Branch Chief determines which agencies will receive support based on priority and the time of the request.

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**GAO** San Diego Aviation Branch Drug  
Interdiction Resources as of May 1996

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**Personnel**

- 55 (pilots, air interdiction officers, and management and support staff)

**Aircraft**

- 6 airplanes
- 6 helicopters

**Cessna 210 Centurion**



**Mission support  
helicopter**



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Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**San Diego Aviation Branch  
Drug Interdiction  
Resources as of June 1996**

As of June 1996, 55 personnel were assigned to the San Diego Aviation Branch (including the Riverside Aviation Unit). This included 29 pilots, 12 air interdiction officers, and 14 support personnel.

The San Diego Aviation Branch and the Riverside Aviation Unit had a total of 12 aircraft, including 6 helicopters and 3 Cessna Citation II interceptors. As of June 1996, the Branch had one Citation II and one UH-60 Black Hawk available 7 days a week to respond to the Domestic Air Interdiction Command Center.

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GAO San Diego Aviation Branch FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Cost

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Estimated FY 1995 expenditures were  
\$6 million

Customs' Budget Office estimated that  
95 percent of this cost was related to  
counterdrug activities--using this  
percentage, we calculated total drug  
interdiction cost to be \$5.7 million.

Estimated cost includes salaries,  
expenses, operations, and maintenance

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Source: U.S. Customs Service.

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**San Diego Aviation Branch  
FY 1995 Drug Interdiction  
Cost**

According to the Customs Air Interdiction Division, the estimated total expenditures of San Diego Aviation Branch operations for fiscal year 1995 were \$6 million.

For ONDCP reporting purposes, Customs' Budget Office estimated that 95 percent of Aviation Branch expenditures were related to counterdrug activities. Using this percentage, we estimated the total fiscal year 1995 drug interdiction cost for the San Diego Aviation Branch to be \$5.7 million.

Both total and drug interdiction cost estimates include funding amounts from several different appropriation accounts, including the salaries and expenses and operations and maintenance accounts.

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GAO San Diego Aviation Branch FY 1995  
Drug Interdiction Measures

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2,412 mission flight  
hours:

- 11 percent foreign interdiction
- 22 percent domestic interdiction
- 67 percent other domestic support

Domestic interdiction  
launches - 30

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Domestic seizures:

- 6,145 lbs. of cocaine
- 3,368 lbs. of marijuana

Domestic support  
seizures:

- 28,000 lbs. of cocaine
- 6,000 lbs. of marijuana

Source: U.S. Customs Service.



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**San Diego Aviation Branch  
FY 1995 Drug Interdiction  
Measures**

In fiscal year 1995, the San Diego Aviation Branch logged a total of 2,412 mission flight hours. Of the 2,412 flight hours recorded, 11 percent were spent on foreign interdiction, 22 percent on domestic interdiction, and 67 percent on other domestic support activities.

During fiscal year 1995, Branch personnel conducted 30 domestic interdiction launches in response to Domestic Air Interdiction Command Center alerts.

Excluding seizures resulting from foreign interdiction activities, the San Diego Aviation Branch reported seizing 6,145 pounds of cocaine and 3,368 pounds of marijuana, and assisting other law enforcement agencies in seizures of about 28,000 pounds of cocaine and about 6,000 pounds of marijuana.

# Customs Faces Challenges

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## GAO Customs' Drug Interdiction Mission Challenges

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Difficult to determine costs of drug interdiction efforts, especially at ports

Measuring effectiveness is problematic; Customs experimenting with COMPEX at major passenger ports

Special agents say that much of their time is spent on port cases

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Customs' financial information systems are not designed to account for drug interdiction costs. This affects Customs' ability to determine whether allocation of additional resources at a specific port or in a specific region has produced commensurate benefits. Customs officials told us they are developing mission- and performance-based budgets, in accordance with Department of the Treasury directives, that are meant to enable them to determine with greater reliability the costs of drug interdiction activities throughout Customs.

Like all other law enforcement agencies engaged in the fight against drug smuggling, Customs has labored to develop performance measures. Traditional output measures do not allow officials to gauge whether drug interdiction activities are producing positive results. Even the new nontraditional measures being developed may not allow Customs to assess over time whether increased efforts are producing better outcomes. Customs has implemented the COMPEX program in Miami and at other major passenger ports as a potential approach intended to measure the effectiveness of drug interdiction efforts in passenger processing.

Special agents investigating drug smuggling activities, especially in the San Diego area, told us that they were limited in their efforts to identify sources and destinations of drugs smuggled across the Southwest border because so much of their time had to be spent on thousands of marijuana cases, most of which involved less than 100 pounds of marijuana each. Agents told us that given their resources, the time they had to devote to these “port cases” keeps them from following up on promising leads.

Because our fieldwork was limited to Customs’ offices in Miami and San Diego, we cannot say with certainty that the challenges that exist in these two offices also exist throughout Customs’ field offices. However, because Miami and San Diego represent two of the areas with the greatest volume of passenger and cargo traffic and highest risk of drug smuggling, we believe that the challenges Customs faces there are important factors for both Congress and the Customs Service to consider when assessing the effectiveness of Customs’ drug interdiction activities.

# Major Contributors to This Briefing Report

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General Government  
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