

Law Enforcement Investigation and Detection Needs

by

NCJRS

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ACQUISITIONS

Thank you David. I would like to say first of all that I'm really pleased to be here and to have the opportunity to speak to each and every one of you. I hope that I'm able to give you some food for thought, and that you can come up with some innovative ideas to help me in my profession.

The majority of narcotics smuggled into the state of Texas today, are being smuggled via commercial vehicles, truck tractors and semi-trailers. We have pretty much gone full cycle in the state of Texas. Back in the early- to mid-70's, it was the same case. We were seeing truck tractors coming up from the Rio Grande valley area. We were commonly getting loads of anywhere from five to 10,000 pounds; the smugglers were using the commercial vehicles to get their narcotics to the Houston and Dallas areas, and from there further north.

In the mid-70's, I'd say about 1975-79, the smugglers got smart and decided to change their method of operation. In Texas, we saw the smugglers go to using small single- and twin-engine aircraft and marine vessels to smuggle their contraband. We had the entrepreneurs, the pilots out here making a lot of money flying contraband up that way. That lasted until approximately the early- to mid-80s. I think we educated them, and they got tired of losing their major loads;

so they changed to the method of using small vehicles. By small vehicles, I mean passenger cars. The reason behind this, was mainly that they could smuggle many loads per week. If they lost one, it didn't really hurt their organization or their pocketbook. From about the mid-80's to the present time, they have gone back to using the commercial vehicles to smuggle their contraband north from the Rio Grande Valley. It is very common today.

The loads we're finding today range from eight to 1,000 pounds, in both marijuana and cocaine. These smugglers are not, by any means, uneducated. They're very sophisticated and very smart. We have done our part to educate these people; because each time we arrest one of these individuals, we educate about fifty of them. They are very innovative and very rich. I personally think they employ people to sit around, and do nothing but think of ways to beat the law enforcement.

They operate under an unlimited budget. I guess that is a luxury we do not have. From the federal system down to the local level, we all operate with fixed budgets; and it's very hard to combat these people. The families and organizations have been doing this for many generations, it has passed down from grandfather to father to son; from

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mother, to daughter, and it gets very hard to penetrate these groups.

I have some slides that I'd like to present to you, and I'm going to go kind of quickly, because of the time allotted to each speaker. These are actual cases and actual things that we've seen in Texas.

This looks like a very harmless piece of equipment. If you saw that going down the highway, you would probably not think twice that it might hold some type of contraband. As you can see, they've gone inside it and loaded the dope inside, I mentioned truck tractors and semi-trailers as being the major methods of smuggling narcotics today. You'll see several pictures of this, but I'd like to point something out on this particular one. If you observe the tires on the truck tractor, they've become very smart and very well-educated. They took these tires off and welded eight metal cylinders around the edge of them. Each cylinder can hold approximately 16 kilos of cocaine. They put the tire back onto the truck, fill it with air, and drive into the United States. We see this done most often today in Guatemala.

If you look at this picture, you see a very common method of smuggling narcotics: using saddle tanks. There are various methods of doing it. They take it and cut it in half. Half the tank would be narcotics, the other half would be filled with fuel. They may load it with a cylinder down inside the center of it, then put the fuel around it. This is very common. We see

those a lot. It is somewhat easy to detect because they are not really good welders; and we can see the lines on the saddle tanks.

This particular truck was loaded with produce, and I'll talk a little bit more about that later; but it looked like rotten produce. There was 775 pounds of cocaine loaded in this trailer. Another method is the use of cover loads. Cabbage is a very common choice these smugglers use. Why? Because it smells. Especially if it's rotten. You don't want to sit around and smell that stuff. Very few narcotics officers like to climb up in there and end up smelling like that for about a week. Something else is wrong in this picture; can anybody tell what that is? You don't freeze cabbage. These guys did. I guess they didn't want any drugs to get frozen up there. We have, however, also found contraband in frozen food such as shrimp, fish, things like that. I have no idea why they froze the cabbage. You can see what they did. They stacked the cabbage on the top of the load, and inside the boxes was also marijuana. They normally put that stuff in the center. They don't want to make it easy on you. They put it in the center, and cover it back up.

Here is another one using raw cabbage. They normally pull the front of the truck tractor in the produce side sheds and leave the front of the trailer vacant. They will tell the guy to load up the rest with produce. They take it back to another site, take that part off, load in the contraband, and

throw the produce in behind. Here, they just put in almost all the cabbage.

Here is another truck tractor. The unique thing about this one, was the refrigerator unit hadn't worked in years. If I was hauling cabbage to New York, it would be pretty ripe by the time I got there, wouldn't you think? That was an indicator.

Onions are another very common load. That is, again, because of the smell. Nobody likes to get in there to load and unload 10,000 pounds of onions. A lot of times, they don't put it on the pallets. That makes it too easy for us. They just throw it is there, and you can see it buried underneath the cover load.

This slide illustrates the use of saddle tanks. That illustrates what I've been saying about leaving the cargo open. They put that behind the boxes up front. They put the stuff up front, and the produce they put out in back. This was under a load of jalapeno peppers.

Here is another one where the riffer unit did not work on the trailer. This is a fairly unique false compartment. They've done a pretty good job on that particular compartment. One of the things we look for in detection is the changing of rivets. You can see where it is cleaner on one side, and much dirtier on the other. That means they have moved something around in there—changed it, altered it somehow. On the inside of the trailer, these are some of the panels that we would look for. They put this inside the walls, and I have a slide to

illustrate that. We look at some of the rivets in the floor, where they pulled it up. The new part just doesn't match with the old. You can see that the bottom down there is a little bit newer than the other part. This is a rather unique situation. Upfront it does not work. When we first looked into these particular trailers, they were completely loaded with mangoes and onions. We unloaded the entire trailer, and there was nothing there. It was completely empty. We took a measurement of the inside of the trailer, and measured the outside of the trailer. There was about four feet of difference. In the front, they put in a false compartment. There was about 2,500 pounds of cocaine in that particular trailer.

Here are some more illustrations. Saddletanks are used very commonly for smuggling today.

This is a rather unique one. These gentlemen are cutting off the roof of the trailer. On the next slide, you can see they're peeling the roof off of that trailer. These people have taken the entire roof and side panels off of this trailer, taken the insulation out, and marijuana became the insulation. We worked on these people and let several of them go. It seemed like months and months. We used a dog; the dog alerted us every time he worked, around the trailer. We couldn't find anything. We felt they had used this trailer in the past, because the dog picks up the scent, even if drugs had been there before. We kept letting them go

One day, one of the sergeants that worked with me, used a high-tech tool called an icepick and stuck it in the side of the trailer. Lo and behold, when he pulled it out, it was covered with marijuana leaves. There is no telling how many loads got by us before we realized they were doing this.

These trailers were loaded in Mexico. You can see that the whole roof of the trailer was loaded with marijuana.

This was also a unique case. Everybody knows what this is: it's one of those pieces of equipment that works on the highway, a very large piece of equipment. When we first got on this thing, we knew it was loaded, but we didn't know how we could get to the drugs. We couldn't find them. We started drilling into the side of the thing, thinking that it might be where the guy told us it might be, in the transfer case. The first thing we found when we drilled was oil. We thought: Wait a minute! We just messed up somebody's equipment, and I didn't want to buy something that was that expensive to replace. But we went forward with it, got up on top with a jackhammer; and you can see that they encased the whole thing in concrete. They put the marijuana inside the transfer housing. This hole doesn't look very big, but it was big enough for an individual to go inside and unload the marijuana. You can see where we had to cut down through it. That's the inside of the cylinder blocks. It was a pretty unique way of smuggling contraband. Very few people would stop highway equipment going down the road. I

think there are about 5,000 pounds of marijuana in that particular piece of equipment. See how dirty it was when we got it out of there.

Here's another illustration of the inside, where they tried to hide false compartments under desks. I really don't think it takes a rocket scientist to figure out what they've done, but they got away with it for years and years.

That's just one of those false floors. You can see all three ways they tried to disguise it. You can see where they've taken it out and bonded it back up so they can remove the floor.

I want to show you a few of the smaller vehicles. We still get a few of these. Most smaller vehicles are not carrying narcotics. They're carrying money, the currency going back into the state of Texas. These vehicles have false compartments just like the large vehicles. I have some illustrations of it.

This is one with the gas tanks on the back of the car. You can see where they've cut it to put contraband inside the gas tank and put it back together on the vehicle.

This one is pretty unique. This guy had taken the headlights out, stuffed marijuana into the fender and put the lights back in. When he was ready to remove the contraband, he would take the lights back out, pull it out and put his lights back in. The last piece of the contraband had string on it so he could just pull it out.

Let me go ahead and finish now, so we can get on with this. If anyone has any questions at the end of the presentation, I'll be happy to visit with you. Thank you very much; I've enjoyed visiting with you.