



Search and Rescue Efforts for FY 2015

June 30, 2016

Fiscal Year 2016 Report to Congress



Homeland
Security

U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Message from the Deputy Commissioner of CBP

June 30, 2016

I am pleased to submit the following report, “Search and Rescue Efforts for FY 2015,” which has been prepared by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP).



The report has been compiled pursuant to the language set forth in House Report 114-215 accompanying the *Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act* (P.L. 114-113). This report outlines search and rescue efforts during FY 2015 for each sector. This report also details procedures for the identification of deceased individuals; cooperative activities with state and local governments and nonprofit organizations; procedures for responding to rescue beacons, distress calls, and missing persons’ reports; and plans for reducing border crossings and deaths in remote areas along and near the border.

Pursuant to congressional requirements, this report is being provided to the following Members of Congress:

The Honorable John R. Carter
Chairman, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

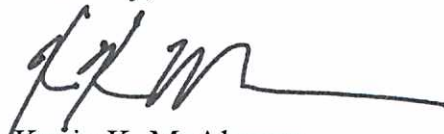
The Honorable Lucille Roybal-Allard
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security

I would be pleased to respond to any questions you may have. Please do not hesitate to contact my office at (202) 344-2001 or the Department's Deputy Under Secretary for Management and Chief Financial Officer, Chip Fulghum, at (202) 447-5751.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. McAleenan', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Kevin K. McAleenan
Deputy Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Executive Summary

CBP components strive each day to secure our Nation's borders at and between the ports of entry. Although securing our borders is our top priority, security missions often give way to rescue missions because the harsh conditions cannot be avoided by those most susceptible to the elements. CBP is constantly searching for ways to best address these challenges either through equipment and/or policy and program implementation. To alleviate these challenges, the U.S. Border Patrol has several programs and initiatives focused on increasing border safety and minimizing the risk of migrant deaths.



Search and Rescue Effort for FY 2015

Table of Contents

I.	Legislative Language	1
II.	Background	2
III.	Data Report	3
IV.	Discussion	6
	A. Methodology	6
	B. Identification of Deceased Individuals.....	6
	C. Cooperative Activities with State and Local Governments and Nonprofit Organizations	7
	D. Response Procedures.....	7
	E. Reducing Border Crossings and Deaths in Remote Areas.....	7
V.	Conclusion.....	9
	Appendix - List of Acronyms.....	10

I. Legislative Language

This document was compiled pursuant to the legislative language set forth in House Report 114-215 accompanying the *Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Appropriations Act* (P.L. 114-113).

House Report 114-215 states:

The Committee commends CBP's search and rescue efforts, in particular the Border Patrol Search, Trauma, and Rescue (BORSTAR) Unit, and encourages CBP to expand its engagement with State and local counterparts and nongovernmental organizations in providing necessary medical aid and reducing deaths. Within 60 days of the date enactment of this Act, CBP shall provide a report to the Committee on its search and rescue efforts during the prior fiscal year, including the number of deaths by sector and a description of the methodology for counting such deaths; the number of rescue beacons by sector; the frequency of rescue beacon activation; and the number of individuals rescued by the Border Patrol as a result of rescue beacons. In addition, the briefing should address procedures for the identification of deceased individuals, cooperative activities with State and local governments and nonprofit organizations, procedures for responding to rescue beacons, distress calls, and missing persons reports, and plans for reducing border crossings and deaths in remote areas along and near the border.

II. Background

The BORSTAR Unit was created in 1998 in response to the growing number of injuries to Border Patrol agents and migrant deaths along our Nation's borders. BORSTAR is located at the U.S. Border Patrol's (USBP) Special Operations Group Headquarters in El Paso, Texas. BORSTAR provides specialized law enforcement search and rescue response from conventional to high-risk Border Patrol operations, Federal Emergency Management Agency mission assignments, national search and rescue operations, national special security events, and specialized training support directed by DHS for both domestic and foreign government agencies. BORSTAR is the only national law enforcement search and rescue entity with the capability to conduct tactical medical search and rescue training for federal, state, local, and international government agencies. Since the inception of BORSTAR in 1998, the unit has evolved and enhanced its capabilities to fulfill better the missions of DHS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), and USBP, both domestically and abroad.

On a national level, BORSTAR is strategically located to deploy rapidly throughout the United States. As part of Sector Special Operations Detachments, BORSTAR supports the *2012–2016 Border Patrol Strategic Plan* by conducting intelligence-driven operations to target transnational criminal organizations, high-risk areas, and crossborder criminal activity. BORSTAR comprises experienced USBP agents selected from all USBP sectors to attend and successfully complete the BORSTAR Selection and Training Course.

The BORSTAR Selection and Training Course is a physically and mentally demanding course in which candidates are evaluated in various search and rescue techniques, tactical medicine, technical rescue, land navigation, communication, swift-water rescue, air operations, and the ability to work in a cohesive unit. Upon completion of the BORSTAR Selection and Training Course, BORSTAR agents receive additional advanced specialized training in emergency medical; tactical medicine; technical rope rescue; paramedic; austere medic; load planner; helicopter rope suspension training; rescue watercraft/boat operator; cold-weather operations; personnel recovery; small-unit tactics; tactical combat casualty care; operations management and planning; advanced dive; and, swift-water rescue operations.

III. Data Report

The table below outlines USBP’s search and rescue efforts during FY 2015, including the number of deaths by sector.

Table 1	
Search and Rescue Efforts by Sector (FY 2015)¹	
Rio Grande Sector	
Number of deaths	98
Number of rescue beacons	8
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	482
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	6
Tucson Sector	
Number of deaths	63
Number of rescue beacons	32
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	N/A ²
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	222
Yuma Sector	
Number of deaths	6
Number of rescue beacons	21
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	1,161
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	2
El Paso Sector	
Number of deaths	2
Number of rescue beacons	5
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	0
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	0
San Diego Sector	
Number of deaths	6
Number of rescue beacons	0
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	N/A ³
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	N/A
El Centro Sector	
Number of deaths	5
Number of rescue beacons	8
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	1

¹ Please note that in sectors indicating a high number of activations, these are largely attributable to remote activations by the sectors themselves for purposes of conducting tests and to address technical issues.

² This sector does not record the total number of activations, but only the number of rescues that resulted from a beacon being activated.

³ San Diego sector does not have any rescue beacons. The appropriate data fields are thus marked “N/A.”

Table 1	
Search and Rescue Efforts by Sector (FY 2015)¹	
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	0
Laredo Sector	
Number of deaths	47
Number of rescue beacons	6
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	119
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	0
Del Rio Sector	
Number of deaths	12
Number of rescue beacons	2
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	0
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	0
Swanton Sector	
Number of deaths	0
Number of rescue beacons	0
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	N/A ⁴
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	N/A
New Orleans Sector	
Number of deaths	0
Number of rescue beacons	0
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	N/A
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	N/A
Ramey Sector	
Number of deaths	0
Number of rescue beacons	0
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	N/A
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	N/A
Miami Sector	
Number of deaths	0
Number of rescue beacons	0
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	N/A
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	N/A
Buffalo Sector	
Number of deaths	0
Number of rescue beacons	0
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	N/A
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	0

⁴ Swanton, New Orleans, Ramey, Miami, Buffalo, Houlton, Detroit, and Spokane sectors are all either coastal or northern border sectors, which do not have rescue beacons. The appropriate data fields are thus marked "N/A."

Table 1	
Search and Rescue Efforts by Sector (FY 2015)¹	
Houlton Sector	
Number of deaths	0
Number of rescue beacons	0
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	N/A
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	0
Detroit Sector	
Number of deaths	0
Number of rescue beacons	0
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	N/A
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	0
Spokane Sector	
Number of deaths	0
Number of rescue beacons	0
Frequency of rescue beacon activation	N/A
Number of individuals rescued by USBP as a result of rescue beacons	0

IV. Discussion

A. Methodology

Border-related deaths are tracked in the Border Safety Initiative Tracking System (BSITS). BSITS is funded and managed by the USBP. BSITS establishes a client-server database that serves, through Web-based applications, as the central repository for collecting, managing, and disseminating critical incident data related to suspected undocumented migrant deaths and USBP rescues in selected counties along the U.S. border with Mexico. The data are used for analyzing the number and locations of deaths and rescues, categorizing deaths and rescues, identifying trends, and identifying high-risk areas. The data also are used by key USBP field and headquarters planners in the budget planning process for allocating resources for border safety-related projects and measuring the effectiveness of other programs and projects.

A border-related death is defined as: 1) a suspected undocumented migrant; 2) while in furtherance of an illegal entry; 3) within a designated target zone whether or not USBP was directly involved; and/or outside the designated target zone when USBP has direct involvement with the incident.

Once the official cause of death is determined by the medical examiner/coroner, a suspected cause of death is cited in BSITS and categorized as:

- Environmental Exposure-Heat
- Environmental Exposure-Cold
- Motor Vehicle Accident
- Water
- Other

B. Identification of Deceased Individuals

USBP will notify the law enforcement and coroner's offices within the jurisdiction of the located deceased individual. Local law enforcement will conduct an appropriate death-related investigation, and the county coroner will assume responsibility for the deceased. USBP will contact the coroner's office to request cause of death and identity determination. USBP will contact the deceased individual's native country's consulate office for notification.

C. Cooperative Activities with State and Local Governments and Nonprofit Organizations

In an effort to minimize migrant deaths, USBP continues to share best practices with state, local, and foreign government agencies to enhance response capabilities and safety along our borders. USBP sectors engage with nonprofit organizations through border community liaison cooperative efforts. Some examples of these best practices and efforts include working with local emergency 911 centers to increase response times to distress calls, attending community engagement meetings to increase communication with local residents to report illegal border crossings, and developing mutually beneficial relationships with local search and rescue entities to increase joint capabilities.

D. Response Procedures

To respond to rescue beacons best, USBP agents are strategically deployed in areas where response times are expedited to any beacon activations. Furthermore, USBP agents are forward-deployed to reduce response time for distress calls, and response is coordinated with other agencies.

In regard to missing persons' reports, USBP utilizes internal and external communication mechanisms to obtain and disseminate vital information pertaining to the missing person(s), and to respond for appropriate resolution.

E. Reducing Border Crossings and Deaths in Remote Areas

USBP has several programs and initiatives that are focused on increasing border safety and minimizing the risk of migrant deaths.

USBP medical initiatives provide emergency medical response training to agents throughout the entire border region with specific focus in high-risk areas. USBP currently has more than 1,000 certified emergency medical technicians, as well as paramedics and first responders.

USBP is proactive in providing public awareness through communicating the dangers of crossing the southwest border both within the United States and abroad. The USBP complements the DHS media campaign plan to reach out to potential migrants in their home countries to discourage them from attempting to enter the United States illegally.

USBP contains more than 200 BORSTAR Unit agents who are specially trained and certified in advanced search and rescue techniques, emergency medical technician (basic to paramedic level), tactical medicine, technical rope rescue (high angle rescue), cold and hot weather survival/rescue, water/swift-water rescue, search and rescue canine, and air

operations. BORSTAR is a rapid response unit strategically located along the southwest border that is on call and available to respond to emergent situations for extended periods of time. BORSTAR agents are deployed to remote, high-risk areas throughout the southwest border to conduct law enforcement operations and to mitigate risks associated with traversing U.S. borders.

V. Conclusion

CBP will continue striving each day to secure our Nation's borders at and between our ports of entry. CBP will continue to develop ways to address these challenges with equipment and through policy and program implementation.

Appendix- List of Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
BORSTAR	Border Patrol Search, Trauma, and Rescue
BSITS	Border Safety Initiative Tracking System
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FY	Fiscal Year
USBP	U.S. Border Patrol