



## NEWS RELEASE

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August 3, 2001

### **INS Expands Search and Rescue Capabilities Along Southwest Border** *BORSTAR Graduates Form Core of New Search and Rescue Teams*

SAN DIEGO, Calif. – The newest members of the Border Patrol’s Search Trauma and Rescue (BORSTAR) team graduated here this morning following a grueling six-week academy that included training in skills ranging from rappelling to water survival. The 32 graduates will form the core of new BORSTAR teams being established in four additional Border Patrol sectors – El Centro, California; Yuma, Arizona; Del Rio and Marfa, Texas. The expansion of BORSTAR was one of the agreements reached during the recent series of meetings between the U.S. and Mexico on binational efforts to promote border safety.

“The Border Patrol has always recognized that protecting the border includes an obligation to protect lives. With the graduation of these agents, we are better prepared to meet this obligation,” said Gustavo De La Viña, Chief of the U.S. Border Patrol.

“Promoting safety along our borders is our highest priority and the rigorous training you’ve received these past weeks will be a huge asset in that effort,” Johnny Williams, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) Western Regional Director told graduates.

Currently, the agency has BORSTAR teams in the San Diego and Tucson Border Patrol sectors. BORSTAR agents in these sectors use their search and rescue and medical skills to aid migrants who have become lost or injured.

Each BORSTAR agent receives specialized training on conducting search and rescue operations in remote border areas. In addition, the agents learn how to provide the immediate medical assistance necessary to stabilize patients and transport them to areas accessible to paramedics, helicopters and other advanced emergency medical services.

The creation of new BORSTAR teams also allows for the expansion of binational training with Mexico. Last year, team members shared their expertise with more than 400 Mexican law-enforcement officials, with the goal of significantly increasing that number in 2001.

“Joint training is vital,” De La Viña explained. “In addition to producing better-trained agents, it also fosters more collaborative working relationships on both sides of the border.”

The steps taken to enhance public safety at the border have already produced dramatic results. In San Diego Sector, agents have rescued more than 300 migrants so far this year – more than double the number rescued during the same period the previous year. For example, in June BORSTAR agents rappelled from a helicopter into a remote area of the Otay Mountains to rescue a man with a broken leg who had been drinking stagnant water to survive.

BORSTAR is part of the binational Border Safety Initiative launched three years ago. Under this initiative, Border Patrol agents have been working to educate the public about the dangers of illegal crossings, and to rescue those who fail to heed those warnings.

Since launching the initiative, Border Patrol agents have rescued more than 4,400 migrants from life-threatening situations, and others from less serious, yet still dangerous circumstances.

(Editor's Note: Broadcast beta format b-roll of the BORSTAR training is available. For more information, contact Western Region at 949-360-3096.)

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