

# FRONTLINE

U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

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**ALL IN** CBP'S UNPRECEDENTED  
RESPONSE TO HURRICANE MARIA



## We are CBP

Border Patrol agents from the McAllen Station's marine unit patrol the Rio Grande by the Anzalduas Dam near Mission, Texas. Photo by Rod Kise

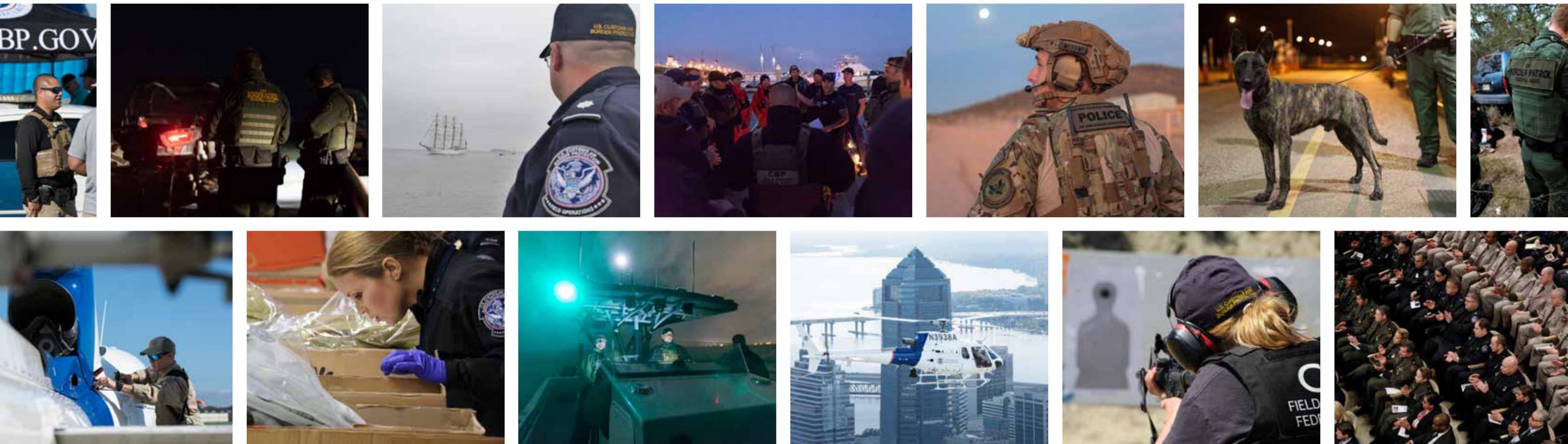
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Cover photo by Ozzy Trevino



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U.S. Customs and  
Border Protection

# FACING THE CHALLENGE OF MARIA

CBP'S UNPRECEDENTED HURRICANE RECOVERY EFFORTS

By Marcy Mason



After Hurricane Maria, the worst natural disaster in Puerto Rico's history, pummeled the U.S. territory last September, it left a path of crippling destruction in its wake. The magnitude of damage to Puerto Rico's infrastructure was so devastating that it wiped out the entire electrical grid, plunging the Caribbean island into darkness. The catastrophic aftermath of the storm—flooding, mudslides, collapsed bridges, downed trees, communication towers that had been knocked out—and the struggles endured by the people who live in Puerto Rico are, by now, widely known. U.S. Customs and Border Protection had never faced a natural disaster quite so challenging. But using its resources and ingenuity, the agency created an unprecedented supply chain that helped Puerto Rico during the initial weeks of its recovery.

By the time Hurricane Maria unleashed its fury on Puerto Rico, striking the island on Sept. 20, with 155-mile per hour winds, CBP had already, only weeks before, responded to two other catastrophic storms that season. But Maria was much more challenging because the Category 4 hurricane hit an island more than a thousand miles away from the U.S. mainland.

"It's not like when a hurricane hits the continental United States, where once the storm passes, you can drive relief supplies, personnel, and other resources into the impacted area. On an island, everything has to be shipped in," said Vernon Foret, CBP's Caribbean area commander who oversaw the agency's emergency response efforts in the region.

But it was much more than that. There were a myriad of other logistical challenges created by the storm. "Normally in preparation for a major storm such as a hurricane, we pre-position aircraft and people so we can get into place to conduct rescue and recovery operations," said Eric Rembold, the executive director of CBP's Air and Marine Operations for the Southeast region. "But Puerto Rico is an island a thousand miles away and we couldn't do that. We were busy taking our aircraft and people off the island for protection. Typically, we would be there within hours, as soon as the storm passes and the winds die down, but, in this case, we really couldn't do that until about 30 hours after the storm," said Rembold.

## Recovery operation

The storm had barely cleared the northwest coast of the island and CBP's aircraft were already flying in. At first, CBP's Air and Marine Operations surveyed critical infrastructure such as dams, bridges, major roads and hospitals. "We start by making assessments to see just how bad the storm is, to understand the magnitude of the devastation, and then determine what resources are needed," said Rembold. "We stream live video to different command centers throughout the country—our own and the Federal Emergency Management Agency's."

After that, CBP's focus became a recovery operation. "We were trying to find out the wellbeing of our employees," said Rembold. But communication became extremely difficult because the cell towers and landlines were down, and there was no electricity across the island, so trying to reach the employees for 100 percent accountability became extremely challenging.

Making the situation worse, the roads were impassable. Fallen trees, debris, downed power

lines, large pot holes, mudslides and collapsed bridges were all obstacles that vehicles needed to maneuver. "Driving on the roads to find our people was not an option at first," said Rembold. "It was too hazardous." Instead, CBP used Black Hawk helicopters to search for employees on the island. "Every day we would gather a list from our lead field coordinator in Miami and send it down to our agents in Puerto Rico. 'This is the list. We need you to check these 10 people today,'" Rembold added.

The agents began searching the island to account for the nearly 700 CBP employees who worked in Puerto Rico. The teams would fly from CBP's Caribbean Air and Marine Branch in Aguadilla, on the west side of the island. "We'd fly to a town, land, and start walking around, looking for CBP employees. We'd literally walk up to people and say, 'Hey, we're looking for these three people. Do you know them?' Invariably they knew one or two of them and where they lived," said Jeffrey Birks, a CBP supervisory air interdiction agent and critical care flight paramedic.

While they were there, the agents tried to help the local townspeople. "These people were completely

isolated, so we had to do something to help them stay in contact with the outside world,” said Birks. He copied down names and telephone numbers to call relatives in the U.S. on a satellite phone when he returned to CBP’s air branch. “I probably made 40-50 calls. ‘I saw your nephew, niece, aunt, uncle, grandparents. They’re alive and well and their house is standing. They don’t have any telephone service, so they can’t call you, but they wanted you to know that they are okay.’”

Food and water were also scarce as well as other supplies. “It was very hard for us. You couldn’t find water or food anywhere. Everything was closed,” said Ramiro Cerrillo, CBP’s incident commander responsible for relief and recovery efforts on the west side of the island.

The San Juan airport was also shut down. Five days after the storm, it reopened—but just barely. The airport had been badly damaged during the hurricane and was running on generators. In fact, almost everything on the island was running on generators.

## Innovative response

All of this was a major concern for Diane Sabatino, the director of field operations for Miami and Tampa, who was designated by CBP Commissioner Kevin McAleenan as the lead field coordinator for the

Southeast region including the Caribbean. Sabatino was responsible for coordinating the agency’s relief and recovery efforts to make sure CBP’s personnel were accounted for, safe, and for the short-term, help them adjust to as normal a life as possible.

Although CBP had a long history of responding to destructive hurricanes, including most recently Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, the circumstances in Puerto Rico were unlike anything the agency had ever encountered. Sabatino and her team had to act quickly and find a way to deliver food, water, and other supplies to the CBP employees who desperately needed them a thousand miles away.

After reaching out to an emergency operations team at headquarters, Sabatino decided to create a supply chain using CBP assets—aircraft, vessels, personnel, and the agency’s expertise on how a supply chain works. “We’re very unique as an agency that we have the set of skills to do this,” said Sabatino. “We manage and enforce regulations on supply chains every day and we see how they operate. We deal with international importers, exporters, and shippers on a daily basis. Only now, we were standing up our own supply chain. We essentially became the importers, the shippers, and the distributors in Puerto Rico.”

Countless decisions needed to be made. None of them were easy. Sabatino and her team calculated consumption rates to know how much food and water to send. They also found ways locally and



through CBP headquarters to procure the supplies with a depleted, end-of-fiscal-year budget.

“We took everything that we had prepared for the entire hurricane season and shifted it to Puerto Rico,” said Eduardo Alvarez, the emergency preparedness coordinator for CBP’s Miami Field Office. “Typically, we would try to save some supplies, because the season wasn’t over. We could have a storm next week, but this was massive. Everything we had was sent and we used every available purchase capability locally.”

Getting the supplies to Puerto Rico quickly was also critical. “It takes three to four hours to send supplies to Puerto Rico by plane,” said Sabatino. “By barge or ship, it takes a minimum of four days, and that’s if the sailing conditions are good.” As a consequence, food, water, diapers, hygiene products, and other items that were needed immediately were sent by air. Supplies such as portable toilets, showers, washing machines, dryers, and generators that contained fuel were sent by vessel.

CBP set up two transit points. Supplies sent by air were flown out of Homestead, Florida, where CBP’s Miami Air and Marine Branch is located. Anything shipped by sea was loaded onto barges at the port of Jacksonville. The quantity of supplies was enormous. “We had so many supplies going into our hangar at Homestead, we didn’t have room for our aircraft,” said Rembold, who explained that the problem was alleviated after CBP was allowed to use a nearby military hangar. “It’s a huge hangar, so we were able

to store our supplies there and use our hangar for our aircraft,” he said.

The supplies were transported on CBP’s P-3 and DHC-8 aircraft. “Under normal circumstances, these small, maritime patrol planes are used for surveillance,” said Rembold. But within a matter of hours, the aircraft were converted to haul cargo. “That’s something we have never done before in our history,” said Rembold. “But there was no other way we could get these lifesaving supplies over to the island as quickly as we did.”

Finding fuel was another challenge. “Here in the islands, when we have this type of disaster, it’s very difficult to get fuel,” said Rubén Cruz-Lugo, acting assistant director of mission support at CBP’s San Juan Field Office. “So knowing this, a few years back, as part of the CBP emergency preparedness program, we gave a letter to one of our vendors, stating that for national security purposes, our systems needed diesel fuel for the essential functions we do during an emergency.”

The letter worked. When the fuel distributors in Puerto Rico read the letter, CBP was given the same priority as other mission essential functions of the government. “We had fuel the day after Hurricane Maria hit,” said Cruz-Lugo. “Without that letter, it would have taken us weeks or even months to find a contractor with a tanker who would have been willing to supply us with fuel.”



Gregory Haynes, CBP air interdiction agent, loads bottled water at the agency’s Caribbean Air and Marine Branch in Aguadilla, on the west side of the island. Photo by Ozzy Trevino



U.S. Border Patrol Agent Jesse Serio, left, offers his satellite phone to a resident of Caban, Puerto Rico, to contact his family in the continental U.S. to let them know he survived the storm. Photo by Mani Albrecht

## All accounted for

After nearly four days, CBP achieved 100 percent accountability for the agency's employees and staff. "Usually we can account for people within hours," said Rembold.

Accounting for CBP's employees and making sure that they and their families are taken care of is critical for the island's recovery. "Our employees have to be at work to make sure that trade starts to come back as soon as possible after a storm like this happens," said Foret. "If we're not there to make sure that the goods coming in are facilitated to get them as quickly as possible on store shelves, the people who are impacted aren't only CBP employees, it's anybody who relies on things coming through the port. This includes basic necessities—food, water, fuel, communication equipment, and construction materials that are needed after a devastating hurricane."

But CBP's mission extends beyond that. "Our job is twofold. We facilitate legitimate travel and trade, but we also have an enforcement and antiterrorism mission, and there are people who are going to exploit this type of situation for nefarious means," said Foret. "Our employees are the frontline and need to be out there to ensure that we're detecting and deterring criminal activity from happening—whether it's illegal aliens or the flow of narcotics coming into the area. Everything we do on a daily

basis we still need to do in the aftermath of a hurricane, and our employees need to be there to get that done."

CBP employees throughout the agency were worried about their families in Puerto Rico. "Once the storm passed, our employees were trying to communicate with their families, but couldn't, so they started to ask us for help," said Alvarez at the emergency coordination center in Miami. Hundreds of requests poured in asking CBP to check on the welfare of family members on the island. "The emails became overwhelming for our staff," said Alvarez. "So we modified our intranet site so that it could be accessed across the agency. If someone wanted to request assistance for his or her family in Puerto Rico, he or she could do so through the intranet site." After the new site opened on Sept. 23, the agency received more than 1,500 requests for wellness checks on family members in Puerto Rico.

"We were notified daily from headquarters about different people to do wellness checks on in the area," said Cerrillo. "They weren't necessarily immediate family members. A lot of them were distant relatives."

## Wellness checks

Such was the case for Sharon Brown, a CBP contracting officer in Washington, D.C., who

volunteered to help with the agency's hurricane procurement efforts in the Emergency Operations Center at headquarters. Brown had several cousins in Puerto Rico that none of her relatives in the U.S. had heard from after the hurricane. "I added their names and addresses to the list on the intranet site to see if someone could check on them," said Brown.

A CBP medical team, comprised of a paramedic, an emergency medical technician, and a CBP officer who served as an interpreter, drove an hour and half to a small, remote village in the mountains southwest of San Juan to check on Brown's cousins. "The roads were not impassable, but they were treacherous at times," said Ryan Ziliak, a CBP officer and emergency medical technician from Pembina, North Dakota, who volunteered to assist with CBP's relief effort in Puerto Rico.

The CBP team knew very little about Brown's cousins. "All we were told was the family needed food, water, and oxygen," said Ziliak. When the team arrived at the family's home, they discovered that one of Brown's cousins, Iris Zayas, was in a coma and hooked up to a ventilator to assist her breathing. "She only had about 20 percent oxygen left in the main cylinder," said Geoff Smith, a CBP paramedic based in Sterling, Virginia. "The family told us that the warehouse that belonged to the hospice facility that

supplied them with oxygen was destroyed and there wasn't any way to refill the tank."

It became apparent that Brown's cousin needed medical care at a hospital. But the family thought the local hospital was overwhelmed from the hurricane and too busy with other patients. The CBP team decided to drive over to the hospital to see if the medical staff would help Mrs. Zayas. "We had a conversation with the director of nursing and his supervisory staff," said Smith. "We explained the situation and briefed them on Mrs. Zayas' medical condition and they said, 'Okay, you can bring her in and we'll take care of her.'"

At that point, the CBP medical team needed to find an ambulance to transport Mrs. Zayas. They went to the local fire department and found an ambulance and paramedics who were willing to help. "We followed the ambulance back to the house, helped them load the patient, and then we transported her to the hospital. We also made sure that the Zayas family had plenty of food and water," said Ziliak.

When Brown heard about her cousin, she was relieved and grateful. "CBP saved her life," said Brown. "We didn't know that there was such a dire need. If it weren't for CBP's intervention, we would never have known that her health was so precarious."



A CBP medical team, Ryan Ziliak, right, and Geoff Smith, far left, assist a local paramedic in lifting a patient into an ambulance. While conducting a wellness check on a CBP employee's relative in a remote mountain town southwest of San Juan, Ziliak, an emergency medical technician, and Smith, a paramedic, saved the woman's life. Photo by Harry Fraticelli

## Helping the community

CBP's help extended beyond its employees. "We never said, 'No,' to anyone who asked for help," said Smith. "If anyone in a community asked us for a case of water or to evaluate them medically, the answer was always, 'Yes.' Every time we evaluated one patient, it turned into about 80 evaluations because we wanted to do whatever we could."

In one instance, when Smith and Ziliak were en route to help clear debris at a children's playground, they saw an overturned car on the other side of the highway and stopped. "I grabbed our medical gear and we ran over to the car," said Ziliak. The driver had been pulled out by a group of bystanders and was sitting in another vehicle in front of it. "Geoff and I assessed her medically. She was complaining of back pain, rib pain, and dizziness." The CBP medical team calmed the woman. Her pulse rate came down and her dizziness went away. "Once we finished the assessment, I held her neck just in case there were any back injuries. Then we waited until an ambulance came," said Ziliak.

Sometimes CBP saw distress signals from the air. "While we were flying from town to town looking for our people to account for them, we saw a house with the word, 'HELP' written on the roof," said Birks. "A small group of people were standing outside the house, waving their hands at the

helicopter. Our pilot circled back and we thought, 'Oh, we better go check.'"

The helicopter landed in a clearing on a mountain top. A mudslide had completely washed away the road leading to the house. "We had to hike about a half mile through the woods, climbing over fallen trees and there was mud everywhere," said Birks.

When the CBP Air and Marine agents arrived at the house, they found two families gathered together. Birks, a paramedic, did a medical check on the 74-year-old man who they had been worried about. "They thought he was having a diabetic emergency," said Birks. "He was out chopping trees to try to clear the road and he came back feeling horrible. He was malnourished, poorly hydrated, and had not taken his medicine, so we saw to it that he took his medicine and gave him some food and water, which improved his medical condition and made him feel better."

Then Birks checked the health of four other people at the house. "It turned out he was the healthiest of the five patients I saw," said Birks. "I checked their blood sugar levels, vital signs, and made sure they were taking their medicines and had enough food and water, too."

In some instances, CBP reached out to the community. As an adoptive parent, Cruz-Lugo was



CBP brought water, food, and other supplies to orphanages and shelters throughout the island. Above, Rubén Cruz-Lugo distributes bottled water to children at an orphanage in the Puerto Rican countryside. Photo by Pedro Ramos

aware of a number of shelters in Puerto Rico where the government places orphan children and children who come from abusive homes. "Knowing the government of Puerto Rico had limited resources, we thought we might be able to help others in the community," said Cruz-Lugo.

So CBP's San Juan Field Office reached out to an orphan home near the San Juan Custom House to find out if they needed food or water. "We were told that their home was okay, but there were many other orphan homes throughout the island," Cruz-Lugo said.

Among them was Hogar Cuna San Cristóbal, a shelter for children located in the countryside near Caguas, a city south of San Juan. When CBP arrived 10 days after the hurricane with a truckload of supplies, the orphanage still had no electricity and was in urgent need of water. "It was a critical moment for us. No stores were open and we didn't have water," said Ivonne Vélez, the executive director of the home.

Fourteen children, ages 1-7, lived at the shelter, and Vélez was worried. "I couldn't sleep at night. In my mind, I kept asking myself, 'What am I going to do?' Because if we don't have food or water, we might have to close the home," said Vélez. And then, much to Vélez's surprise, CBP arrived with water, food, and other supplies. "It was an answer to a prayer," she said. "Help came at the moment that we needed it the most, and in the most surprising way."

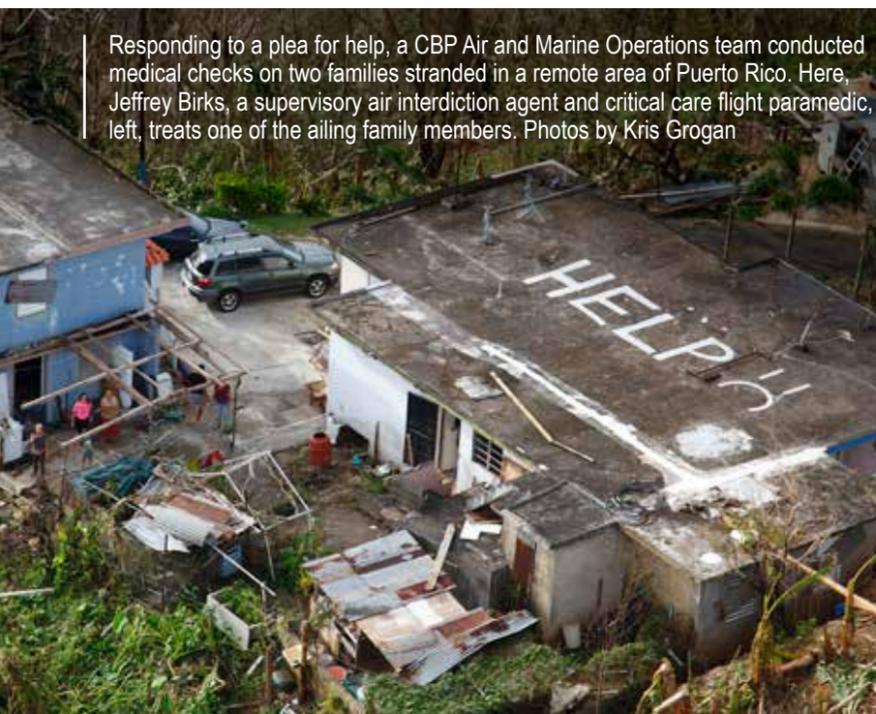
As part of its assistance efforts in Puerto Rico, CBP brought water, food, and other supplies to nearly 700 people at 10 orphanages, one shelter for adults and children, and a monastery that serves an entire community.

## Busy supply chain

The flights to Puerto Rico started out slow the first couple of days, but then ramped up. "Once we started the supply chain, we were doing five to seven flights per day," said Rembold. "Anytime we flew from the U.S. to Puerto Rico we filled the aircraft from floor to ceiling with cargo—food, water, supplies, and first responders. We not only took CBP teams, but Homeland Security Investigation teams, and a lot of first responders from other federal agencies."

Within a few days, the return flights were filled with evacuees. "We realized we were flying back with empty airplanes and there were a lot of people on the island who wanted to evacuate," said Sabatino. Most of the passengers were CBP employees and their relatives. For many, it was the only way to leave the island.

Such was the case for Daisy Francisco, who was visiting her parents and sisters in Puerto Rico. Francisco had originally planned to fly home to New Jersey on Sept. 20, the day Hurricane Maria made



Responding to a plea for help, a CBP Air and Marine Operations team conducted medical checks on two families stranded in a remote area of Puerto Rico. Here, Jeffrey Birks, a supervisory air interdiction agent and critical care flight paramedic, left, treats one of the ailing family members. Photos by Kris Grogan



As part of its relief efforts, CBP evacuated agency employees and their relatives from Puerto Rico. Below, CBP assists as Department of Homeland Security employees and relatives board a plane in San Juan headed to Florida. Photo by Ozzy Trevino



landfall. She saw the storm was coming and tried to get an earlier flight, but they were all booked. “It was a nightmare,” said Francisco. After the storm, she was stranded. “My husband booked me on three different flights and each one kept getting canceled. I felt like this is never going to happen. I’m never going to get out.”

Then Francisco’s brother-in-law, a Border Patrol agent, told her that there was a possibility that she could get on one of the CBP flights that was leaving from Aguadilla. Francisco realized that she could not leave without her parents, who were in their 80s. “My mother would not fare well because she’s on high blood pressure medicine, diabetes medicine, and she was already hospitalized earlier this year with a really bad case of bronchitis. My fear was if my parents got sick, they wouldn’t be able to get any help because they live deep in the countryside,” said Francisco.

The next day, Francisco, her parents, and one of her sisters were able to get on a flight, which landed in Homestead. “Every Border Patrol agent that we encountered throughout our trip was extremely kind and generous. They exemplify all that is good in humankind,” said Francisco. “If it weren’t for them, I don’t think my parents would be here now at this stage—five weeks later. I know people who have been trying to get off the island and can’t.”

## Bigger planes

After about a week, CBP realized that the supply chain would be much more effective using larger planes. “We had all of these supplies that were starting to amass in Homestead and there was just no way that we could get them on our aircraft in a reasonable amount of time,” said Rembold. Most of the supplies came on pallets that could be driven onto cargo planes with a forklift. But with CBP’s small P-3s and DHC-8s, the seats needed to be removed and supplies had to be hand loaded onto the planes. “It was very time consuming,” said Rembold.

CBP’s first thought was to ask the U.S. Coast Guard if it could borrow cargo planes. The Coast Guard agreed, but only for a day. “They had their own life sustaining operations,” said Rembold. But the cargo aircraft worked well, so CBP decided to charter larger planes.

Finding the money to procure the aircraft wasn’t easy. “We realized it was going to be a challenge because we were getting ready to close out the fiscal year,” said Dario Lugo, CBP’s Emergency Operations Center manager in Washington, D.C. “But the component offices within CBP came through. They pooled their remaining money and we chartered aircraft for 18 flights, 12 for cargo and six to evacuate CBP personnel, their families and others who were impacted by the storm.”

Not only could CBP ship more supplies with fewer flights, leasing planes made fiscal sense too. “It would have taken our aircraft at least three days to move the equivalent of one charter flight,” said Lugo. “It also freed up our aircraft to perform other life safety missions and return to their normal function of protecting the borders.”

CBP also provided employees with other kinds of support. “We knew that employees were going through a lot after the hurricane and it could have been overwhelming for them. They were being asked to provide comfort to other people when they were going through the same devastating experience,” said Cerillo. “We wanted to make sure we had healthy employees, not just physically, but mentally, so we had people who came in to provide peer support.”

## Supporting FEMA

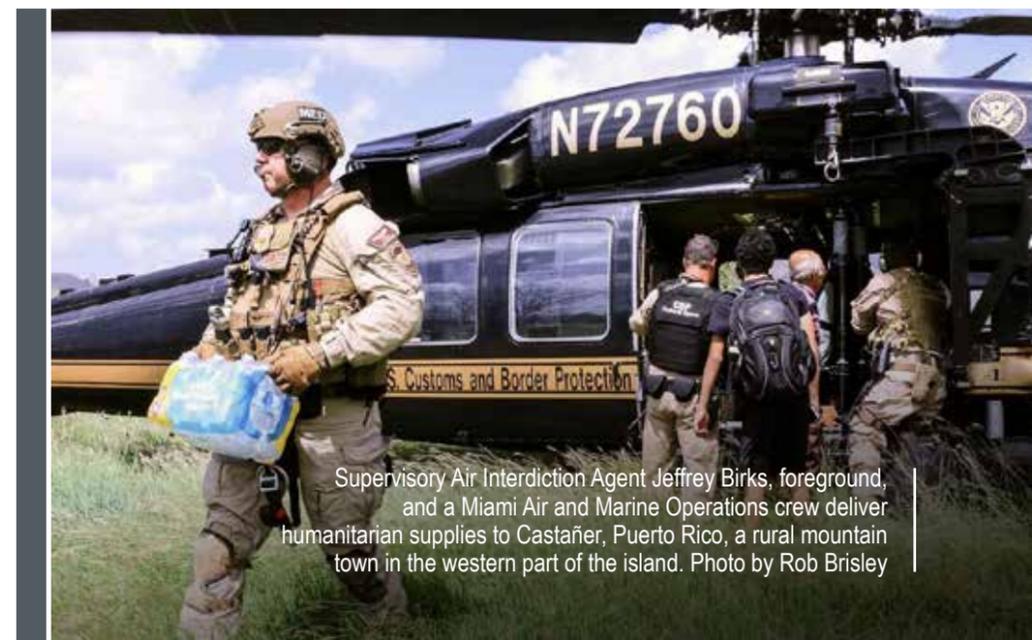
In addition to these efforts, CBP assisted FEMA. Three days after the storm passed, CBP aircraft began supplementing the Federal Aviation Administration’s radar, which is part of FEMA’s infrastructure recovery mission. “All the FAA radar on the island had been decimated,” said Rembold. “When the San Juan Airport reopened its passenger operations to the airlines, it needed a type of radar separation because the U.S. Department of Defense was bringing more and more aircraft into the environment. Our aircraft played a very vital role in keeping that radar separation intact.”

On the west side of the island, CBP collaborated with the U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Army, and the U.S. Marine Corps to assist FEMA with the distribution of food and water. “The local municipalities would request areas of distribution and FEMA would give us direction,” said Cerrillo. “If there were any distribution points where the roads were inaccessible, we would take on that challenge.”

CBP also was asked to fly a congressional delegation to some of the remote areas of the island. The delegation, which was led by Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Paul Ryan, included Lt. Gen. Jeffrey Buchanan, the three-star officer who led the U.S. military’s emergency response in Puerto Rico; and U.S. Coast Guard Commandant Admiral Paul Zukunft. “The devastation was of such a magnitude that they requested our help to be able to get up close to see the different sites throughout the island,” said Rembold. “We took the delegation to some of the remote areas in Puerto Rico, many of the places where we delivered food and supplies.”

Similarly, CBP flew reporters from the Weather Channel and other news outlets throughout the island, but broadcasting conditions were difficult. “There was no power until five days after the storm passage,” said Rembold. “It wasn’t even possible to get on the island via commercial means, and with the collapsed infrastructure the media couldn’t broadcast out. It appeared that nothing was happening to help Puerto Rico, but we knew differently.”

Within days after the storm, CBP’s recovery efforts were already starting to take shape. “Even with the devastation, CBP’s local employees were showing up for work ready to go,” said Foret. “They were determined not to be the reason that a flight could not land or take off or shipments weren’t coming in through the ports. It’s ingrained within the culture of CBP to help one another to make sure the mission is carried out.”



Supervisory Air Interdiction Agent Jeffrey Birks, foreground, and a Miami Air and Marine Operations crew deliver humanitarian supplies to Castañer, Puerto Rico, a rural mountain town in the western part of the island. Photo by Rob Brisley

# HURRICANE SUPPORT SYSTEM

## Headquarters Emergency Operations Center provides a lifeline to the field

By Marcy Mason, photos by Glenn Fawcett



Last year, CBP's Emergency Operations Center in Washington, D.C., was stood up for a record number of 63 days. The center's staff supported CBP's response and recovery operations during Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, Jose, Maria, and Nate.

The 2017 hurricane season set a new record for CBP's Emergency Operations Center in Washington, D.C. The center, which was stood up at CBP headquarters as part of the agency's response to Hurricane Harvey, a Category 4 storm that slammed into South Texas on Aug. 25, remained in place for 63 days.

"It was the longest running Emergency Operations Center that we've ever set up for a natural disaster," said Dario Lugo, operations manager for the center.

But the ongoing response to protect CBP's operations was needed. Harvey was followed by Hurricanes Irma, Jose, Maria, Nate, and other tropical storms. "To have a succession of Category 4 and 5 hurricanes is rare," said Lugo. "In my 10 years of working with incident management at CBP headquarters, this is the first time that we have responded to so many catastrophic storms that made landfall on the continental U.S. and its territories."

For most natural disasters, CBP maintains an Emergency Operations Center from four to seven days, but the amount of time is based on the impact of the storm, so sometimes it runs slightly longer.

"If it's a fast-moving storm the way Hurricane Nate was, which moved swiftly through the Gulf region, four days from beginning to end is not uncommon," said Lugo. "There wasn't a lot of damage, our assessments were done very quickly, and the accountability of our personnel, which is the commissioner's highest priority, was done within a matter of hours."

Even though the Emergency Operations Center is based at headquarters, it is not the brain of CBP's response activities. "We support the individuals in the field who are responsible for the recovery from the event," Lugo explained. "We have easy access to CBP leadership and can obtain answers to their requests in a matter of minutes rather than days or weeks."

CBP's Emergency Operations Center also works closely with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, or NOAA, to monitor storms. "They are the experts in hurricane plotting, charting, and graphing," said Lugo. "It's the tool that any responder in the U.S. government or the media uses. Weather reports are all drafted based on information that NOAA provides."

The staff in CBP's Emergency Operations Center then shares that information with the lead field coordinators and incident managers in the areas affected by the storms. "We make contact with the incident managers within that regional area and then we identify needs and try to estimate what the response will be. Once we determine the impact, we decide how long we will need to support them," said Lugo.

Approximately 15-20 people, representing the different offices within CBP, comprise the nucleus of the Emergency Operations Center. These individuals give information, make decisions, or complete necessary transactions such as purchase supplies or move helicopters, boats, or other assets. "Many times the same person is filling the chair, so some individuals are putting in some long hours," said Lugo. "My staff was there from 6 o'clock in the morning until 10 or 11 at night. Some nights we were there till midnight, but we were there because we wanted to be part of the solution," he said.

"Generally speaking, we never really shut down," said Dwayne Myal, a CBP senior preparedness planner who was part of the core team that worked

63 days in the Emergency Operations Center. "People may go home to rest, but for the most part everybody is still monitoring and following what's happening. If a Category 5 hurricane is approaching, we're not really sleeping because this is a problem that is going to have a major impact on the American public and our colleagues. So it weighs heavy on us. There's no full disconnect."

Mid-September was the most challenging time for those working in the Emergency Operations Center. "When Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico, our recovery efforts were still ongoing for Harvey in Houston," said Lugo. "We also were dealing with evacuation orders for our employees in South Florida, the Florida Keys, and the U.S. Virgin Islands who were suffering from Hurricane Irma. These were all concerns at the Emergency Operations Center at headquarters, and it was the same staff that was working on Harvey, Irma, Maria, Nate, and Jose."

But there was tremendous gratification. "We knew the importance of what we were doing and that we had to do our very best," said Myal. "We had lives depending on us." 

# SURGING AGAINST THE STORM

By John Davis

## Surge Capacity Force helps hurricane-ravaged areas emerge from the 'Dark Ages'

Homes in a Florida Keys neighborhood show damage after the wrath of Hurricane Irma September 12, 2017. Photo by Glenn Fawcett

Geoffrey Ord could hardly believe his eyes. The destruction in the Florida Keys seemed total and endless.

“Some homes were reduced to just matchsticks. Dozens were in the water, in the waterways and canals. They didn’t even look like homes,” said Ord, a program manager at the Customs and Border Protection’s National Targeting Center in Sterling, Virginia. Ord supports CBP’s strategic efforts to ensure fair and competitive trade. But this time, he was a member of the Surge Capacity Force.

The force is a group of federal employees, mostly from the Department of Homeland Security, who volunteered with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, to get people back on their feet in south Florida, Texas, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico after the devastating 2017 hurricanes.

Born in 2006 in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the Surge Capacity Force has approximately 3,600 members who augment federal, state and local disaster responders. CBP currently provides more than 800 volunteers. In 2011, members of the force responded to Hurricane Sandy along the east coast, and lessons from that experience helped form today’s response. Peter Taranto is a senior planning advisor in CBP’s Integrated Planning Division and coordinates the agency’s part of the volunteer force. He said nearly 230 CBP employees left their homes and families to travel to these areas devastated by the series of storms.

“They’re helping their fellow Americans,” Taranto said. “These disasters are the worst thing that could happen to the people affected. It also gives our non-law enforcement folks a chance to get more involved in operations in the field.”

Ord witnessed the devastation Hurricane Irma wrought on the Florida Keys.

“The people there saw an 8-foot storm surge and 140 mph winds,” Ord said. “You dealt with a lot of issues with looting, a lot of people coming back to nothing. No utilities, no power, no running water; certainly no internet or text messages. It was kind of a Dark Ages atmosphere.”

When an emergency happens and officials activate Homeland Security’s Surge Capacity Force, volunteers and their supervisors are contacted to make sure that office can handle that volunteer being out from 45 to 90 days. Taranto stressed while the CBP volunteers draw their regular agency paycheck, FEMA picks up any overtime and travel costs, and the employee essentially belongs to FEMA. Once everyone agrees, the volunteers get their marching orders and head to the disaster site where they join a team, usually made up of several Homeland Security personnel. In future deployments, the groups will include people from several other federal government agencies.

Ord’s team, led by FEMA, also had volunteers from U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Transportation Security Administration, and

Homeland Security headquarters. Their biggest task was to go through neighborhoods and help assess people’s immediate needs and connect them with the right federal, state or local agency or non-profit group. Some people needed money for food; others needed help repairing their homes or finding a temporary residence; and some people just needed to get connected with loved ones. Still others needed help to navigate what sometimes can be the maze of disaster relief options, Ord said. “We went to the field and took their information to accelerate disaster assistance,” he said.

Rick Ramsay is the sheriff of Monroe County in the Florida Keys. His area, including his own home, took a direct hit from the Category 4 Hurricane Irma. As one of the strongest storms ever to hit the area, the Keys endured 12 to 15 hours of hurricane-force winds and 36 hours of tropical storm conditions from the unusually slow moving storm.

“We had power and running water knocked out county-wide, in addition to massive damage done to homes by wind and flooding,” Ramsay said. “Portions of our main highway were also damaged. In the Keys, U.S. Highway 1 is the only pathway to bring in help in the form of people, equipment and supplies. Until we could open the roads, we would have no food, no water, no hospitals, no electricity



Geoffrey Ord, a program manager at Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center, looks at damage from Hurricane Irma to a home in the Florida Keys. Ord was in Florida as part of the Department of Homeland Security's Surge Capacity Force that also went to Texas, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico. Photo courtesy of Geoffrey Ord



CBP's Geoffrey Ord, left, talks with a Florida resident as Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Alfonso De Leon, center, looks on following damage from Hurricane Irma to a home in the Florida Keys. Photo by J.T. Blatty



Teri Villarreal, usually an import specialist with CBP's Rosemont, Illinois, office, helps residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands as a member of FEMA's Surge Capacity Force. FEMA photo by: Kevin Sur



Joe Roche, who normally works in CBP's Office of the Executive Secretariat in Washington, D.C., surveys Hurricane Harvey damage in Texas as part of the Surge Capacity Force. Roche said working with the Surge Capacity Force was an honor. Photo courtesy of Joe Roche

and no ability to repair any of it except using existing resources. We were virtually on our own for the first 72 hours.”

A glimmer of hope came for Ramsay and the beleaguered residents of the Florida Keys when local, state and federal responders, including the members of the Surge Capacity Force, began to arrive.

“When we saw that help coming in, it made us feel better; like we weren’t just by ourselves,” Ramsay said.

In addition, Ord said the force acted as an information pipeline to those cut off from the rest of the world.

“So even though we were there representing the federal government, often times, we were the only official they were seeing,” Ord said. “We carried forward information about what’s going on with the county, what’s going on with the city, what’s going on with debris removal. Even if we didn’t have the information, such as updates on the federal flood insurance program, we went out there and tried to connect them to the official response to the disaster.”

Ord also credited a close working relationship with local officials on the ground, both governmental and non-governmental, to help connect people with the most dire needs with those who can help. “You’re kind of quarterbacking the information on the recovery as you go door-to-door or set up at churches or community tents in the days after the event.”

But help didn’t happen just in the storm-ravaged areas of the country. Matt Snyder normally works in emergency preparedness training for CBP. He also went to Florida as one part of the Surge Capacity Force. After 45 days in Florida, he was sent to western Virginia as a part of the force, conducting casework and manning FEMA disaster assistance hotlines. From a “cube farm” inside a Winchester, Virginia, office, he was part of hundreds of Homeland Security employees who move along the process for people in the storm-affected areas to get immediate and long-term financial aid.

“We help determine if disaster damage requires an in-person inspection or if inspections can be done remotely, which expedites assistance,” he said,

adding they also examine applications for fraud and identity theft, making sure the right people get the right help. Snyder said after viewing the Hurricane Irma damage firsthand, he knows how important it is to get it right. “Our team in Florida dealt with a lot of emotionally distraught people, people needing immediate assistance. Weeks after the storm the focus of the survivors has changed to the status of their aid applications. What my colleagues did then in Florida and are doing now in Virginia is mission essential and meaningful work.”

Taranto said CBP employees who want to volunteer cannot be law enforcers (they have their own taskings during emergency declarations), must have worked for CBP for at least 12 months, and completed online training.

Despite the heat and humidity and the struggle to cope with the “Dark Ages atmosphere” Ord described, he encouraged other CBP folks to consider joining the Surge Capacity Force to help their fellow Americans.

“I definitely would recommend it to everyone who doesn’t mind living in these austere conditions,”

said Ord, adding it was also an excellent opportunity to expand contacts with people in other federal, state and local agencies. “It allows us to work with people we might not have worked with before and then come back and do our regular jobs even more effectively.”

Ramsay expects the recovery in the Keys will last for months--possibly years. But he’s glad people such as Ord “went above and beyond the call” and were there to help. He also knows he can count on help in the future. “United we stand, divided we fall. There’s power in numbers,” Ramsay said.

Ord spent 45 days in the Florida Keys, and the experience gave him perspective on just how much he has in his life well beyond material possessions.

“It is rewarding,” he said. “It gave me a new sense of appreciation for my family and everything I have. Also, it gives you a lot of perspective on the fragility of life. Knowing there’s a need on the ground, it gives you a sense of worth and how much you’re helping the thousands of people you’ve touched in that time.”



# FIGHTING THE OPIOID SCOURGE

CBP disrupts flow of illegal opioids at our borders

By John Davis

The numbers are shocking. In 2016, more than 42,000 people in the U.S. died from opioid overdoses – more than any other year on record, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The toll continues to rise today, claiming, on average, the lives of 91 Americans every single day. President Donald Trump declared the opioid crisis a national health emergency, pledging the full support of the federal government in this fight. Part of that support starts right at America’s borders and ports of entry.

“Like those who distribute and sell drugs on the streets, the criminals who import and distribute narcotics into this country are relentless in their quest for profits and power,” said CBP’s Commissioner Kevin McAleenan. “As America’s frontline border security agency, CBP is uniquely responsible – and uniquely positioned – for disrupting the influx of narcotics.”

“Customs and Border Protection has a large role in battling the opioid emergency, because we’re at the front lines, at the border,” said Amy Schapiro, who’s involved in the agency’s response and is acting branch chief in the Integrated Planning Division of the Operations Support Office for CBP in Washington, D.C. “Illicit fentanyl is produced outside the continental United States, so every time it’s being used, it’s somehow crossing our borders to get into this country. We’re fully committed to disrupting the illicit opioid supply chain and are actively working with our interagency partners.”

A table full of fentanyl and other designer drugs sits on display at the Chicago International Mail Facility. These illicit drugs illustrate a snapshot of what CBP officers assigned to the Area Port of Chicago find in mail shipments each week at the facility. Photo by Kris Grogan

CBP officials created a broad strategy to combat opioids with four primary goals:

- Enhance collaboration and information sharing
- Produce actionable intelligence
- Target the opioid supply chain
- Protect CBP personnel from exposure to opioids

## Improving collaboration and information sharing

The border-crossing nature of the illegal opioid smuggling market makes it essential that CBP also partners with other law enforcement entities charged with helping stop this scourge.

“We interact with national and regional organizations that represent the various levels of law enforcement, such as the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the National Sheriffs’ Association, as well as major cities’ and counties’ police and sheriff’s departments,” said Tim Quinn, executive director of intergovernmental public liaison at CBP. “We tell them we recognize this is a big issue, and CBP has an important role to play in it. When you look at how the drugs are coming in through the ports or the mail and express consignments, that is CBP’s responsibility to stop it at those points.”

Since so many of the opioids originate overseas, part of the work requires embassies and foreign attachés to develop high-level agreements and working groups to stop the flow of the drugs. That includes working with the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, which approaches the illegal drug trade from a security and public health perspective. Through international partnerships, the program, in part, helps break up cross-border narcotics trafficking, using American expertise from the State Department’s 110 partner law enforcement organizations across the U.S.

A good working partnership with some of the United States’ closest neighbors is also key to success fighting the opioid problem.

“Sharing of knowledge between the various agencies is essential so law enforcement can stay on top of current trends and concealments. The more information everyone has, the better chance we have of identifying, interdicting and disrupting,” said Chelsea Stark with the Canada Border Services Agency. “For example, there may be a new concealment method that U.S. law enforcement has seen that my agency hasn’t encountered. Sharing it will allow our officers to recognize it should they encounter it.”

Another part, closer to home, starts literally where the rubber meets the road: America’s

highways. The Domestic Highway Enforcement, or DHE, program links local, state and federal law enforcement officials, in addition to North American international partners, such as Canada Border Services Agency, to catch drugs, currency, counterfeit money, and other contraband, and to break up human trafficking rings. DHE is part of the larger High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas, better known as HIDTA, a program created by the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988 and run through the Office of National Drug Control Policy. The White House-led effort looks to reduce drug use and stress its devastating consequences by leading the development, implementation, and assessment of U.S. drug policy. HIDTA assists federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies working these U.S. drug-trafficking regions.

“CBP, as part of the DHE program, shares the latest intelligence about the smugglers through monthly calls and an information-sharing system benefitting law enforcement agencies across the country,” said Stephen McConachie, a chief CBP officer and the agency’s liaison to the Office of National Drug Control Policy. “If something should get past CBP’s officers and Border Patrol agents, the next layer of enforcement is the state troopers and local law enforcement agencies.”

Those in the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas appreciate the information CBP shares through the DHE network to stop opioid smugglers in their tracks.

“We [law enforcement and CBP] are disrupting these drug-trafficking organizations’ method of operations by and through our partnerships,” said Tony Garcia, director of the South Texas HIDTA, which includes the border with Mexico and is one of the nation’s highest drug trafficking areas. He said dealers consider the American drug user as a “lab rat.” Drug lords try to find different drugs, including synthetic opioids, which can be harder to detect, as well the amount of the drugs users can tolerate. “We have to stay proactive, ahead of the game. DHE is an integral part of information sharing.”

Stark said there are formal international treaties and agreements with U.S. agencies, such as CBP and the FBI, to make sure information sharing complies with Canadian law while catching the smugglers.

“The DHE program provides a lot of timely information on smuggling trends, concealments, officer safety issues and interdiction information that we are able to share with our frontline officers to assist them with intercepting narcotics at Canadian land borders,” Stark said. “We are interested in identifying the Canadian links and networks in order to disrupt future smuggling attempts. I have been able to connect our agency’s intelligence officers with U.S. partners in relation to other modes, such as small marine vessels. So it opens the doors for the exchange of information that helps us all do our jobs.”

McConachie said it comes down to a goal all law enforcement officers have: reduce the supply of illicit drugs in America. “DHE is a good example of working together for a common cause,” McConachie said.

## Producing workable intelligence and cutting the opioid supply chain

CBP also is working on producing the right intelligence to catch more of the deadly cargos as smugglers try to bring them in.



CBP, Office of Field Operations, Officer Monika Branska Carlos inspects a package with possible illegal narcotics at the International Mail Facility at Chicago O'Hare International Airport. The facility is the second busiest location in the country for fentanyl seizures with 82 packages seized last year. Photo by Kris Grogan



CBP officers search a package at the International Mail Facility in Miami. Photo by Keith Smith

“When you look at drugs as disruptive and deadly as opioids, especially fentanyl, which can kill you, it’s scary,” said Steven Stavinoha, director of field operations for CBP’s New Orleans field office. His area includes all of the ports of entry in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee. “Our goal is to stop the illicit drugs.”

While agents and officers at the border and ports of entry check as many shipments as possible, it’s simply not practical to check every shipment. Helping to narrow down which containers and packages to search, CBP’s National Targeting Center uses a program where advance data and access to law enforcement and intelligence records together target travelers and cargo that pose the highest risk to U.S. security.

“We create advanced, predictable targets and let agents and officers at these ports know to be on the lookout for particular types of shipments,” said Robert Gross, chief watch commander at the center’s cargo headquarters in Sterling, Virginia. “After we transmit these various targets to the ports of entry, they’ll inspect those particular shipments, packages or vehicles.”

Some of the places taking most advantage of this advanced targeting information are the CBP offices at express carrier hubs, such as the one in Memphis, Tennessee, where shipping giant FedEx processes hundreds of thousands of international packages

each day, many of them from overseas locations where opioids are initially produced. Stavinoha said it’s not practical to check every package coming through because express carrier companies deliver time-sensitive packages, such as lifesaving medical supplies. So his people rely on good intel from the National Targeting Center.

“When you’re trying to whittle through that haystack of targets, that’s where you need that additional support at the national level,” said Stavinoha, who once served as director of the National Targeting Center’s cargo division. “The center has the capabilities to really do a deep dive on the smuggling organizations, on new trends in smuggling. They look at previous shipments and destinations to link together, as well as other targets to look at, and that is fed back to ports of entry, so we can look for specific targets.”

If a suspicious substance is first found and confirmed at the port, it’s then validated by a lab as a banned item. Then the case is turned over to the appropriate law enforcement agencies, including the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, for prosecution. The targeting center also adds information from those seizures into its database to better understand what to look for in future targets.

Overall, CBP seized nearly 1,500 pounds of fentanyl during fiscal year 2017, partly due to the efforts of CBP’s National Targeting Center. Gross listed some

of the latest opioid seizures the center helped with during 2016 and 2017:

- 10 heroin seizures totaling nearly 18 pounds
- Six seizures of opium weighing almost 33 pounds
- 26 seizures of fentanyl weighing nearly 33 pounds

While the amounts might seem small in comparison to the hundreds of pounds of marijuana that CBP often catches in a single bust, Gross said you have to consider how a small amount of an opioid such as fentanyl can end up being literally millions of fatal doses.

“A dose of fentanyl is only 1 milligram (.000035 ounces),” said Gross. “So a kilo of fentanyl has one million doses in it. And it only takes about 2 milligrams (.000070 ounces) for a fatal dose. So the numbers don’t sound big, but they’re actually huge.”

Gross said the low purity of the opioids smuggled across the border – usually around 7 percent – makes for overall larger seizures. But shipments through international mail and package delivery services are closer to 100 percent pure fentanyl, meaning smaller, but more deadly quantities come through the mail and package deliveries.

Gross said CBP’s work with the U.S. Postal Service, express carriers and foreign governments helps identify more packages that could be carrying the illicit opioids. The efforts are also paying off as more smugglers are being caught. Recently, the U.S. Department of Justice handed down its first ever indictments against several Chinese makers of fentanyl and other opioids, as well as their American and Canadian. Gross said during the past year, CBP helped support investigations and prosecutions by other law enforcement agencies.

“We’re supporting prosecution in 31 current U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and 109 Homeland Security Investigations cases,” he said. “We’ve been conducting a series of operations with the U.S. Postal Service, Homeland Security and DEA targeting various types of drugs.”

Besides the shipments and packages identified by the targeting center, all international mail coming into the U.S. is X-rayed. But even with that close scrutiny, it’s hard to find something measured in milligrams in the tons of mail that come through every day. At the CBP’s international mail processing center in Miami, 60,000 parcels weighing about a quarter of a million pounds are examined each day. That’s a lot to go through to catch drugs handed out in milligrams.

“We have officers looking at everything and pulling targets [suspected packages] off as they go along the conveyor belt,” said Philip Spataro, supervisory CBP officer at the Miami facility who oversees about 30 officers. “It’s a lot of manual labor, and our officers should be commended for their efforts.”

“I think we’re making a difference,” Spataro said. “We’re committed to keeping these drugs off the streets. If you look at the national statistics of the amount of people dying from opioid overdoses, it’s a serious epidemic.”

Gross was also quick to point out CBP didn’t wait to get moving in the fight against opioids.

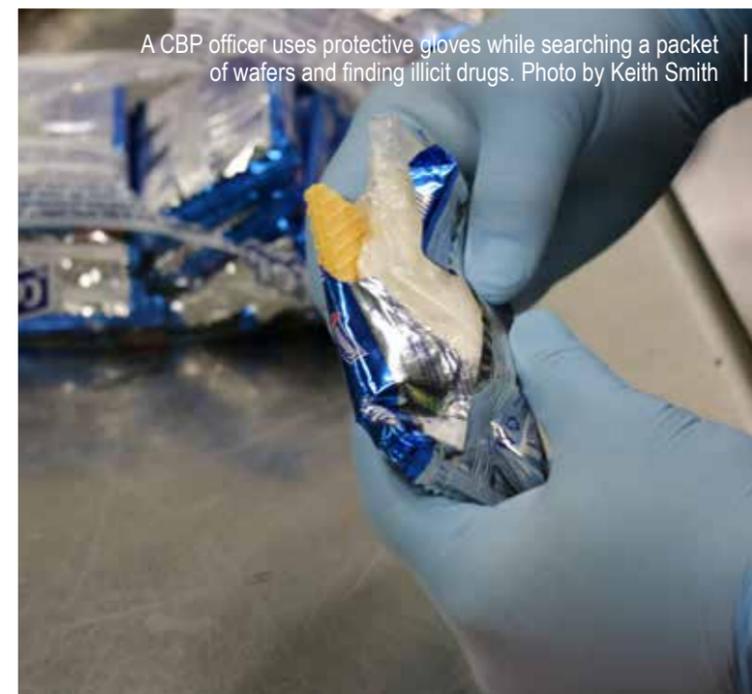
“We’ve been full speed for a couple of years now,” he said.



Photo illustration of 2 milligrams of fentanyl, a lethal dose in most people. Drug Enforcement Administration photo



An officer in CBP’s Office of Field Operations conducts global observations of air traffic and trade activities at the National Targeting Center, a key component in CBP’s response to the national opioid crisis. Photo by Glenn Fawcett



A CBP officer uses protective gloves while searching a packet of wafers and finding illicit drugs. Photo by Keith Smith

Gross said while the targeting center has been crucial in helping stem the tide of illegal opioids, they can't rest on their laurels.

"We need to continue what we're doing and step up our game," he said, adding that getting more help from CBP's foreign counterparts and other U.S. agencies is important. "As we develop new targets, it leads to more targets and new investigations."

Stavinoha's bottom line is pretty direct, considering how deadly the opioid crisis nationwide has become with this latest crop of drugs: Make it tougher for the bad guys to deal in dope.

"I know we're having an impact, because what we're doing is forcing them to try deeper concealment methods or ship through other facilities," Stavinoha said. "Whether you are at a seaport, airport, land border, or express or international mail facility, we have an obligation to the citizens of the U.S. to protect them. We are the guardians of our borders."

## Protecting the frontline from opioids

The potential danger opioids, especially fentanyl and its equivalents, pose to abusers is also apparent

to the CBP officers and Border Patrol agents, as well as their K-9 colleagues.

"In the past, that risk was lower when dealing with opioids, such as heroin or morphine," said Dr. David Tarantino, senior medical adviser for CBP and coordinator of the protection part of CBP's response to the opioid crisis. "But with some of the synthetic opioids, such as fentanyl, the risk has changed."

Tarantino said while the dangers are increasingly clear, part of what they are teaching officers and agents includes debunking some myths. For instance, getting a few grains of fentanyl on unbroken skin will not kill someone; simply brushing it off and thoroughly washing the area with soap and water will prevent adverse effects. In addition, properly worn protective equipment gives significant protection against opioid exposure in most situations.

"We don't want to stop them from doing their job. We want to keep them safe while they do it," Tarantino said. "The risk is real but manageable."

Tarantino said his office is educating officers and agents and offers these precautions to stay safe:

- Personnel should have a heightened awareness of the potential presence of opioids, including fentanyl

- Avoid exposure to cuts, scrapes, broken skin, or mucus membranes (eyes, nose, mouth). If exposed, wash the area with soap and water. Most important, avoid turning the opioid into an air-borne danger and breathing it in, as inhalation increases the risk

- Wear the proper protective equipment: gloves, respirator masks and eye protection. Gloves that cover entire arms can also be part of the package

- Know the signs of opioid exposure in yourself and coworkers: slow or no breathing, drowsiness, pinpoint pupils, and/or an altered mental state

- Make naloxone, a short-term antidote, available to all personnel, and make sure everyone knows how to administer the lifesaving drug

"The increased presence of fentanyl has raised employee's concerns," Tarantino said. "We're working to address those concerns and give people the tools and education they need to carry out their mission."

Nicholas Hanke is a CBP officer program manager in the agency's Office of Field Operations incident management division. He also is the national emergency medical services coordinator for CBP's Office of Field Operations, Emergency Medical

Service program. He said those in the field are trained to a standard used by medical responders for years: Treat every person and every object in the same way, using the proper protections and procedures.

"So you get into the habit of every time wearing your gloves, your eye protection and masks if there's going to be stuff flying around. It's trying to get that same mindset if handling contraband," said Hanke. "Plan for the worst-case scenario."

In addition, glove boxes – a place where packages can be breached to extract a small sample for testing – have become the norm.

"We've gotten officers out of the mindset of pulling out their knives and cutting into the package. Now, we use small styluses in the glove boxes to make small holes," Hanke said. "No longer are we dropping samples of any white powder into chemical drug test kits at the point of discovery. More care in how and where we field test contraband is now required."

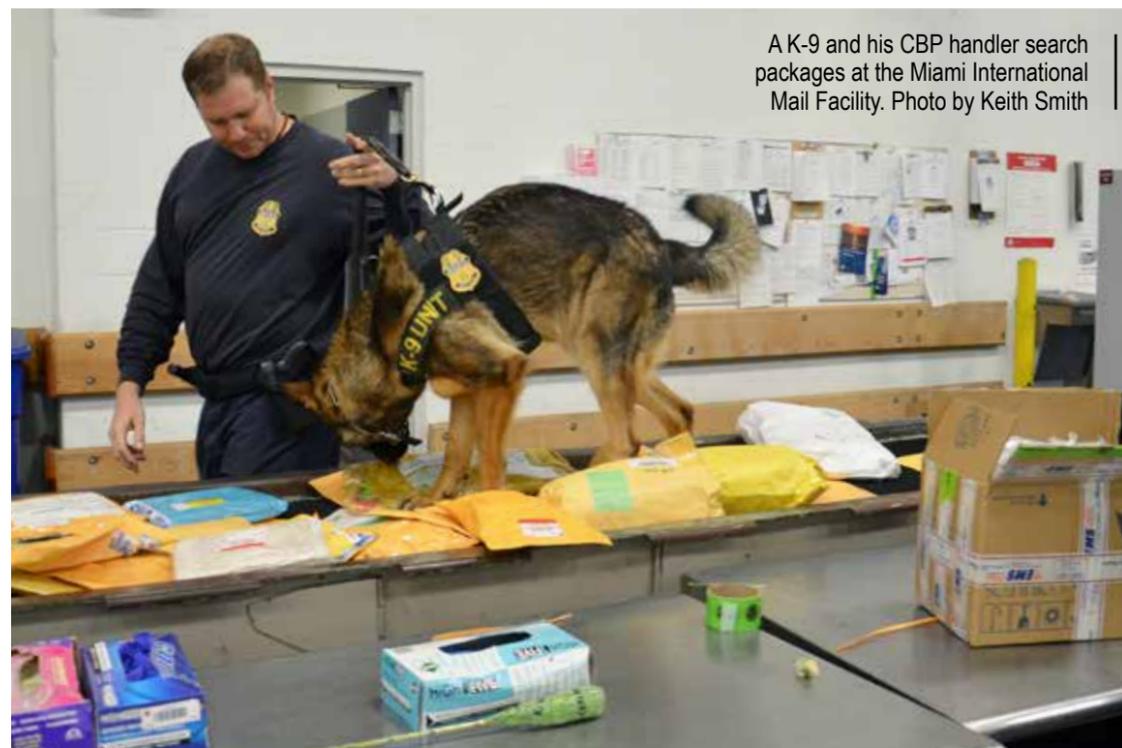
Even K-9 colleagues with the agents and officers are being considered. While you would think drug-sniffing dogs would be at more risk because they literally have their noses right down in the danger zone, the way smugglers wrap up these dangerous narcotics to conceal them from the dogs actually keeps the drugs from escaping the package, preventing exposure.

"We went to a passive dog (one that sits when they find a drug, instead of biting into a package) years ago, well before this danger popped up," said Christopher Houseman, CBP's Office of Field Operations K-9 program manager. Should an accidental exposure occur, dog handlers also carry naloxone to treat their four-legged companions – something those handlers have actually been carrying for 20 years or more.

Whether four-legged or two, Tarantino said keeping all CBP assets safe from opioids is the goal.



CBP, Office of Field Operations, K9 officer Ken Hoffman rewards his dog, after locating narcotics hidden in a package at the International Mail Facility in Chicago. Photo by Kris Grogan



A K-9 and his CBP handler search packages at the Miami International Mail Facility. Photo by Keith Smith

## All in

There are two important common threads for all four of CBP's approach (improving collaboration and sharing information; producing workable intelligence; cutting the opioid supply chain; and protecting the frontline from opioids) to fighting opioids: collaboration and an urgent desire to make sure the fight is successful.

"Our part in this national fight against opioids focuses on the supply chain – where and when these drugs are coming into the country," Schapiro said. "We have to keep the most deadly of these illicit opioids, especially fentanyl and its analogues, out of the U.S."

Tim Quinn, executive director of intergovernmental public liaison, explained CBP's renewed and focused effort to deal with the crisis.

"If we're going to get on top of this, we've got to be working simultaneously in all these different areas,

whether it's abroad or at our ports or taking down international criminals or keeping our CBP officers and Border Patrol agents safe," said Quinn. "Not just one of these things can be done and expect success. All of them have to be done with a real focus given the enormity of the issue."

Schapiro said senior leaders at CBP are making fighting the opioid crisis a priority, as demonstrated in the all-encompassing strategy being executed by the men and women of the agency every day.

"Because of the skyrocketing loss of lives due to drug overdoses, the country as a whole has a responsibility," Schapiro said. "We have to keep illicit opioids out of the hands of family, friends and loved ones."

"Tackling this complex threat involves a united, comprehensive strategy and an aggressive approach by multiple entities across all levels of government," Commissioner McAleenan said. "CBP pledges to work to disrupt and ultimately eliminate these ongoing threats against our communities." 

Supervisory CBP Officer Jose Romo, a course developer/instructor, conducts a vehicle search during training with a canine at CBP's Canine Center El Paso, Texas. CBP photo



## CBP canine teams put real teeth into opioid fight

By John Davis

The rise of fentanyl means CBP canines need to be ready to safely sniff out the deadly opioid. The first classes of handlers and dogs trained to detect fentanyl – along with the other drugs they have been trained to detect in the past – graduated in December 2017 from CBP's canine training centers in Front Royal, Virginia, and El Paso, Texas. Started as a two-week pilot program in June 2017, the training was incorporated into the 12-week, Concealed Human and Narcotics Detection Course. Now, the centers became the very first nationwide to certify canine teams to detect the odor of fentanyl. Going forward, all Office of Field Operations canines will be trained to detect fentanyl.

"In response to the national opioid crisis, we began researching the feasibility of adding this capability to Office of Field Operations canine teams and our training program," said Mark Bazill, acting director

of the CBP Canine Program in the Office of Training and Development. "Through our research and collaboration with CBP's Laboratory and Scientific Services Directorate, as well as other CBP and Department of Homeland Security components, we put together a very rigorous and safety conscious training program."

The newly trained teams of handlers and dogs are already in the field, working to detect fentanyl and other drugs that smugglers might try to bring into the country. More teams are being trained and sent to where they can do the most good, safely.

"All the substances we train with can be deadly to dogs and humans, but fentanyl adds another layer of concern," said Adrian Guerrero, the acting assistant director in Front Royal. "The staff did exceptional work here to implement the additional safety precautions with this substance." 

Seized opioids at the Chicago International Mail Facility. Photo by Kris Grogan



# HANGING TOUGH

How CBP's first Enforce and Protect Act investigation helped America's last wire hanger manufacturer survive

By Marcy Mason

For years, CBP's enforcement actions against antidumping evasion schemes were stymied by legal restrictions, but after the passage of the Enforce and Protect Act of 2015, everything changed.

At a time when domestic manufacturing plants were falling like dominoes because Chinese goods were unfairly priced so low, M&B Metal Products refused to give in. In 2007, the third generation, family-owned business based in Leeds, Alabama, was the last wire hanger manufacturer in America.

"We could have been like all of our competitors that used to make hangers in the United States. They closed their plants and some of them started importing hangers from China. We could have done that, but we wanted to keep production here. We owe it to the people who have helped us be successful over the years to do everything we can to preserve that," said Milton M. Magnus III, the president of M&B Metal Products.

M&B Metal Products stood alone against the fierce competition from China. The company, founded in 1943 by Magnus' grandfather, Milton Magnus Sr., and his partner, Roy Brekle, was struggling. "We had a plant in Virginia that we had to close down in 2006. It was a very painful and tough thing to do," said Magnus. "We had 85 jobs there that we lost."

Magnus fought back and filed petitions with the U.S. Department of Commerce and the U.S. International Trade Commission, alleging that Chinese manufacturers were selling wire hangers at below market or "dumped" prices. "When we filed our dumping case against China in 2007, we were on life support," said Magnus. "We really didn't know how we were going to pay our legal bills."

But Magnus filed the case and won, and for a brief time the company prospered. Then, Magnus and his management team noticed that the imported hangers were coming from other countries. "We saw hangers coming in from Taiwan and Vietnam," said Magnus, who filed another dumping case and

won. Then the shipments moved from Vietnam to Thailand to Malaysia. "None of these countries were producing and shipping hangers to the U.S. prior to the dumping case against China," he said.

## Suspected scheme

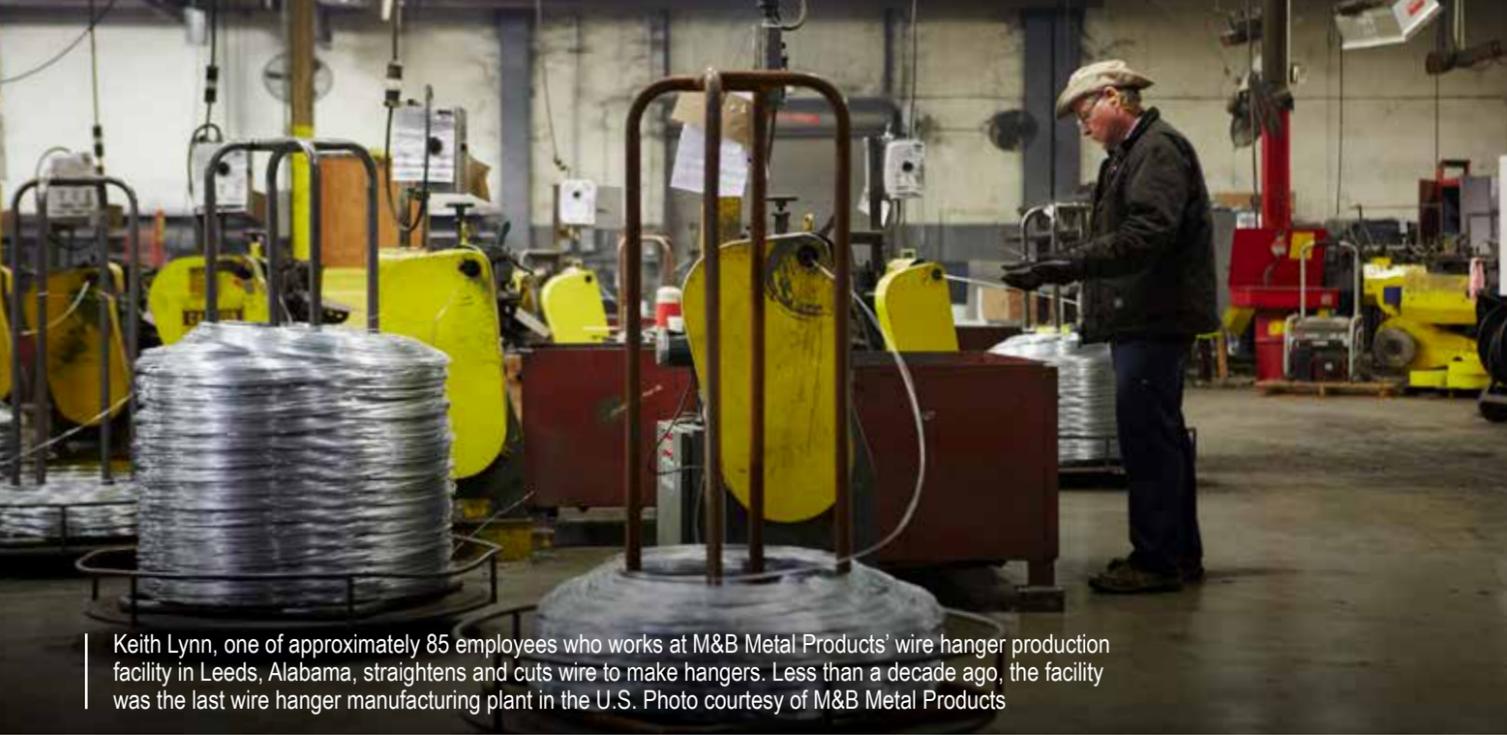
It didn't take long before Magnus and his management team suspected that the hangers were still being manufactured at the same Chinese factories. Only now, the hangers were being shipped through different countries so that importers could avoid paying the extra taxes or antidumping duties that had been added to the price of the Chinese hangers to allow U.S. industry to compete on a level playing field.

As M&B Metal Products' profits plummeted, Magnus reported his suspicions to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, using an online reporting system called "e-Allegations." "We filed e-Allegations from 2008-2014, but nothing really happened," said Magnus. "It was disheartening."

The shipments from Thailand were growing, and in early 2015, Magnus sent an investigator to Thailand to see what he could find. The investigator obtained the Thai manufacturers' financial reports. "Most of them had no sales, no assets. They were dummy corporations," said Magnus. When the investigator made onsite visits, he found little storefronts, not factories. So Magnus decided to file another allegation. Only this time, he met with CBP in person.

"We met with about eight CBP officials and handed them our in-country investigator's report," said Magnus. "They seemed so interested in the report. They listened intently and thanked us, and then we waited and waited for something to happen, but nothing did."

Unbeknownst to Magnus, CBP was actively pursuing the allegation. "We were just as frustrated by the limitations and restrictions of the process," said Troy Riley, the executive director of CBP's Trade Remedy Law Enforcement Directorate.



Keith Lynn, one of approximately 85 employees who works at M&B Metal Products' wire hanger production facility in Leeds, Alabama, straightens and cuts wire to make hangers. Less than a decade ago, the facility was the last wire hanger manufacturing plant in the U.S. Photo courtesy of M&B Metal Products



Heather Smith, a hanger machine operator, inspects the shape and consistency of newly manufactured hangers. Photo courtesy of M&B Metal Products

Magnus was determined though. A few years earlier, shortly after the ruling came out on the dumping case against China, he formed a coalition with other manufacturers in the steel industry that had dumping cases. “They were companies that manufactured nails, threaded rod for bolts and screws, and other items such as bed springs,” said Magnus. “We all saw the same thing happening. Products were coming into the U.S. at very cheap prices from countries that had never produced these goods.” The coalition wanted stronger enforcement and greater accountability. “We crafted proposed legislation that we called ‘the Enforce Act’ and lobbied for about six years,” said Magnus. “We met with CBP officials, the National Association of Manufacturers, Congress, and we had White House meetings.”

Then the coalition grew beyond the steel industry. Other companies that were adversely affected by Chinese transshipments such as manufacturers of tissue paper and glycine also joined the coalition.

## New legislation

In February 2016, their efforts culminated with the passage of the Enforce and Protect Act, or EAPA, a part of a sweeping piece of legislation, the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act of 2015. TFTEA gave CBP its first comprehensive authorities as an agency since it was established in 2003. The

overall objective of TFTEA was to ensure a fair and competitive trade environment. The EAPA legislation was intended to improve trade law enforcement and duty collection.

“Congress was trying to fix some of the concerns that the trade community had brought to them about the e-Allegation process,” said Carrie L. Owens, director of enforcement operations in CBP’s Office of Trade. “They wanted the companies or individuals who filed the allegations to know more about the basis of our decisions. They wanted statutory deadlines for enforcement proceedings, transparency, and the trade community to have more of a role in the process.”

Prior to the EAPA legislation, CBP was restricted from sharing information about investigations. So the companies or individuals that filed e-Allegations were left in the dark. “The process was hampered by the Trade Secrets Act, which prevented sharing any information with the allegor or anyone else because we couldn’t talk about someone else’s importations,” said Riley, who developed the agency’s Enforcement Operations Division to drive the EAPA investigations. “With the EAPA process, Congress spelled out specific requirements of what we can share with the allegor and when. Now the allegor has a window into the CBP process and can influence the proceedings.”

When CBP designed the EAPA process, it went a step further. “We wanted a process that wouldn’t be financially burdensome. We didn’t want to stop anyone from bringing an allegation or participating in a case. We wanted the benefits to far exceed the costs of doing an investigation,” said Owens.

## The benefits

Some of those benefits include a timeline. Previously, when e-Allegations were filed, there were no set timelines. But today, with EAPA, investigations must adhere to a schedule. “From the time we initiate an investigation, we have 90 days to determine whether to apply interim measures to protect the U.S. from losing revenue. We have 300 days to make a final determination. So it’s a very short timeline,” said Owens.

Knowing that a decision will be reached is another benefit. “Companies or individuals that file allegations will now know when a decision will happen and that we’re going to be investigating. They’re also going to see what steps we’re taking in that investigation,” said Owens. “None of that was possible before. The EAPA legislation gave us the authority to do that.”

The new legislation also allows companies and individuals who have filed allegations to provide additional facts and submit comments during the

proceedings. “That’s a huge change from our previous process,” said Owens. “In the past, when we referred a case to other agencies such as U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, we were not at liberty to talk about how an investigation was proceeding.”

Still another benefit of EAPA is the way that cases are coordinated. “Cases weren’t coordinated the way they are now,” said Owens. “Today, a team is assigned to a case, not an individual, and the cases are coordinated from headquarters,” she said. “As a result, everyone on the investigative team is aware of what the rest of the team is doing. This allows us to gather more information more fully and we’re able to make the statutory deadlines.”

## First investigation

After EAPA was passed, Magnus decided to file his allegation about the Thai shipments again. “We updated our report with more current financial information on the companies and did another in-country investigation to make sure that nothing had changed,” said Magnus.

In September 2016, Magnus resubmitted his allegation and it became CBP’s first EAPA investigation. Shortly thereafter, CBP did its own investigation in Thailand, and came back with the same findings. “Our attaché visited the manufacturer in Samut Prakan, Thailand, just south of Bangkok,” said Owens. “He toured the facility, took pictures for us, and asked questions for several hours. From his research, he was able to discern that the company did not have the capability to produce the amount of hangers that they were shipping and that there were many, many other discrepancies.” A few weeks later, CBP issued an interim decision to protect America’s revenue.

Not long after, Magnus saw results. “In December 2016, after we received the preliminary ruling that the hangers from Thailand were actually from China, the shipments stopped. There were no more hangers coming in from Thailand,” said Magnus.

In August 2017, CBP issued a final determination on its first EAPA investigation. “We found substantial evidence that the wire hangers were imported into

the U.S. using an evasion scheme,” said Owens. “The hangers had been transhipped from China through Thailand to evade paying antidumping duties.”

As a result of this success, in early 2017, Magnus filed EAPA allegations on eight importers from Malaysia. “We’re still waiting on the final determination, but the preliminary findings were good,” said Magnus. “CBP’s investigators couldn’t find any wire hanger factories in Malaysia.”

The EAPA allegation process is straightforward. “We file our paperwork and CBP decides if there is enough evidence to pursue an allegation. If there is, then they start their investigation with us and the importers that we’ve identified,” said Magnus. “They don’t assume anybody is guilty or innocent just because of what we say. They do their investigation and they make their own determination. But we wouldn’t file an allegation if we didn’t feel very confident that what we are telling them is true.”

## Successful outcome

Under EAPA, industry needs to file allegations to initiate investigations. “The trade community has the intelligence. They know who is doing the misclassification, the undervaluation, and the other evasion schemes. This program is dependent on industry filing allegations and letting us know, so that we can take action on it,” said Owens, who notes that the program is already showing signs of success. “Within the course of a year, using the new EAPA process, CBP has prevented nearly \$40 million of evasion of antidumping duties just on wire hangers.” Other cases that CBP is currently investigating are listed on CBP’s website on the EAPA “Notices of Action” page at [cbp.gov/trade](http://cbp.gov/trade).

Magnus has seen success too. M&B Metal Products is prospering again. “During fiscal year 2017, our business grew,” said Magnus. “At our Alabama plant,

our production was up over 25 percent. Not only did this impact the financial well-being of our people here at M&B Metal Products, but we’ve generated more business for our suppliers, which are U.S. companies that sell us steel, paint, paper, and boxes.”

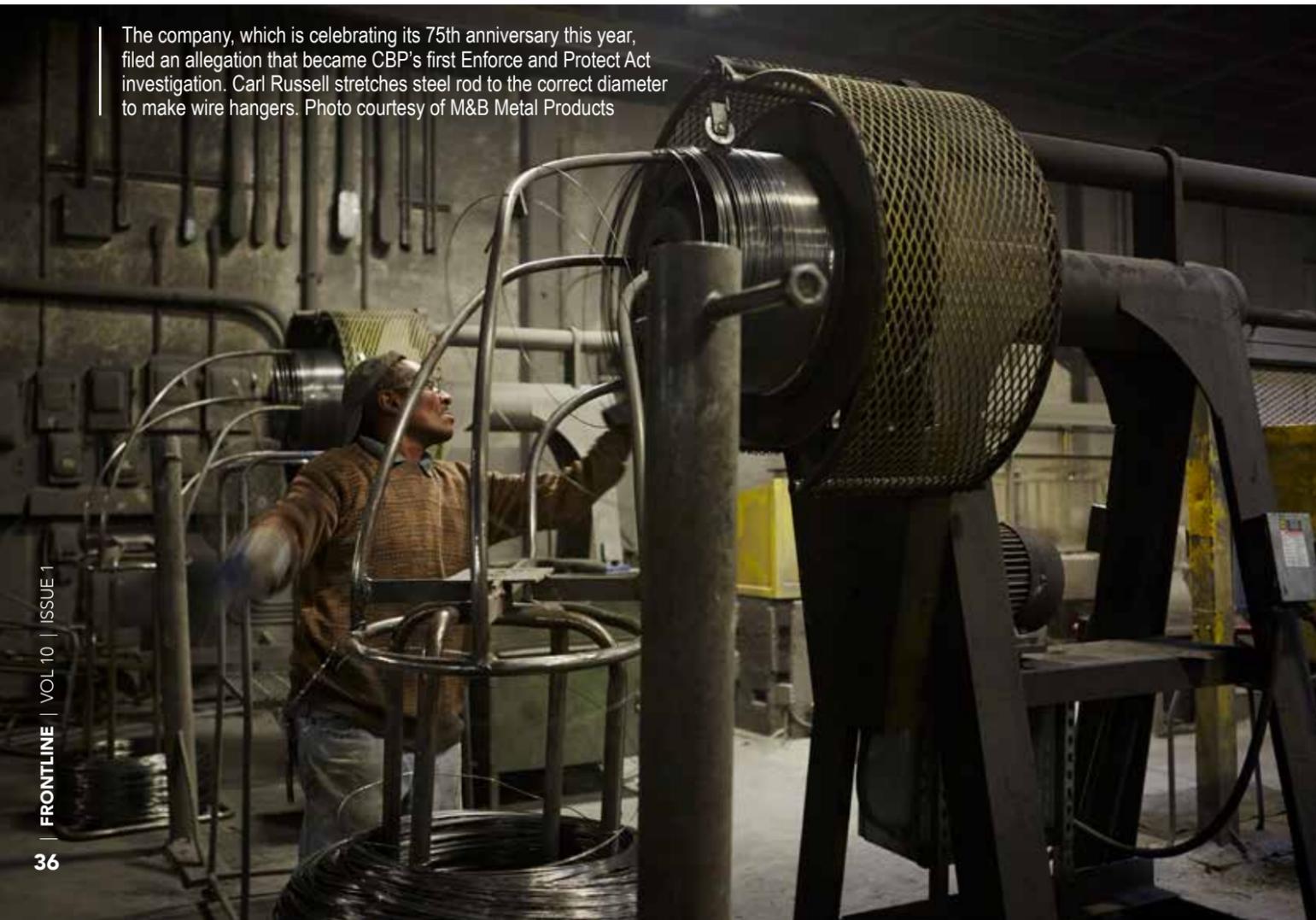
With the increased earnings, Magnus has been investing in the company. “Since we’ve started making money, we’re putting it back into the plant so that we can become more efficient and add processes that we weren’t doing before,” said Magnus. In addition to selling white and gold painted hangers, M&B Metal Products also sells a line of galvanized steel hangers. “We’re getting ready to invest in machinery and add robotics to our operation here in Alabama, thus creating more jobs and making us more competitive to where we can produce more hangers and hire more people,” he said. “We have people that depend on us in Alabama and we depend on them. We’ve got second and third generation families working here, making hangers. We have

employees who are sons, daughters, husbands, and wives.”

The Alabama plant, which employs approximately 85 employees, also gives back to the community. In 2010, M&B Metal Products started manufacturing pink hangers to support breast cancer research. “It’s an ongoing program. We donate part of the proceeds from every box we sell to the American Cancer Society and we sponsor races here to raise money,” said Magnus. “My mother died from cancer years ago. Cancer is something that affects everyone. Everybody has lost a family member or a friend from cancer, so it’s a passion of ours to try to find a cure.”

Today, there are three wire hanger manufacturers in the U.S. The opportunities for business are growing. For Magnus, the EAPA program has been invaluable. “Because of EAPA,” he said, “we see that the hard work that we’ve put in and the money that we’ve invested will actually keep jobs in America.”

The company, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year, filed an allegation that became CBP’s first Enforce and Protect Act investigation. Carl Russell stretches steel rod to the correct diameter to make wire hangers. Photo courtesy of M&B Metal Products



Andres Cook packs hangers for shipping at M&B Metal Products’ Leeds, Alabama manufacturing plant. Photo courtesy of M&B Metal Products



Maria Mata, foreground, packs finished hangers while David Rodda, rear left, and Barry McQueen work at a machine that forms and assembles pant hangers. Photo courtesy of M&B Metal Products

After CBP successfully took enforcement actions against a transshipment evasion scheme, production grew more than 25 percent last year at M&B Metal Products’ manufacturing plant in Leeds, Alabama. Here, Ricky Hawkins, stacks boxes of hangers that will be stored in the company’s inventory. Photo courtesy of M&B Metal Products



# SUPER BOWL MVP MOST VALUABLE PROTECTORS

CBP KEY PLAYER IN PROTECTING AMERICA'S BIGGEST GAME ATTENDEES

By John Davis

During Super Bowl LII, the Philadelphia Eagles' and New England Patriots' offenses put up a record-setting total number of yards and a plethora of points. The Eagles soared to a 41-33 win. Outside the stadium in Minneapolis, defense ruled the day, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection played a key role in a multi-agency effort that brought together federal, state and local officials.

"The other bird is at your 8 o'clock and close," said the sensor operator in an AS350 helicopter, better known as the AStar, circling the stadium in downtown Minneapolis just a few days before the big game. "Got it," the pilot quickly shot back, showing full situational awareness of airspace around the stadium.

About 65 AMO personnel and six aircraft – three UH-60 Black Hawk and three AStar helicopters – worked the Super Bowl this year. They were part of a larger 150-plus force of AMO agents and officers, Border Patrol agents, CBP officers, import specialists and others from CBP locations all around the country.

"We had people from Baltimore to California on the job in and around Minneapolis," said Chief Patrol Agent Douglas Harrison, the lead field coordinator for CBP operations at the Super Bowl. The diversity of the mission, whether it was security, law enforcement or intellectual property rights protections – and the chance to interact with other federal, state and local law enforcement – gave his team much to draw upon for their regular duties back at the ports and along America's borders. "Every operation brings a new experience to the table. We all learn from each other."

usbank  
stadium



A U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Air and Marine Operations, UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter flies over U.S. Bank Stadium in advance of Super Bowl LII in Minneapolis, Jan. 29. Photo by Glenn Fawcett

In the air, AMO had two main missions: be the eyes in the sky and help keep the air space around the stadium safe.

“We provided an aerial downlink with cameras mounted on our birds feeding live video back to the joint operations centers back on the ground, as well as providing that extra level of air security,” said Jonathan Johnson, a supervisory air interdiction agent at a small airport just a few minutes flying time from downtown Minneapolis. “The people back on the ground can ask for our AStar operators to provide video of a particular part of the city. We can check out a suspicious vehicle or people and eliminate any questions of what’s happening on the ground.”

The job of keeping the helicopters air-worthy fell to the maintenance teams.

“We need to keep these birds flying,” said Matt Swazey, a contract aircraft mechanic from Detroit. “We’re keeping them safe, because our aircrews

have an important mission to support. And we’re here to support them.”

AMO was in the area for about a week and a half before Super Bowl Sunday, patrolling the area. On game day, the Black Hawk crews detected, tracked and coordinated the interdiction of aircraft violating a temporary no-fly zone for miles around the stadium. If any aircraft violated that air space, CBP was ready to intercept. CBP, the Department of Defense, other federal assets and local law enforcement had been planning and coordinating security for more than a year.

“This is a large puzzle with a lot of moving parts,” Johnson said.

In the run-up to the game, CBP screened thousands of vehicles that carried in the food, souvenirs, high-definition television equipment and fans to celebrate this year’s Super Bowl.

It’s a process made quicker and easier with CBP’s

non-intrusive inspection equipment. A large X-ray machine for semitrailers is used, while a smaller, more mobile version of the same technology mounted on the back of a truck is used to scan personal vehicles, delivery vans and recreational vehicles.

“We scan vehicles coming in for explosives, weapons and anything that might look out of place,” said James Askin, a CBP officer from the Port of Newark, New Jersey, operating inspection equipment in the back of a giant X-ray truck under a tent at the Minnesota State Fairgrounds, just a few miles from the stadium. “Nothing gets in without our thumbs-up.”

“These machines basically take an X-ray of a vehicle,” said Gerald Durand, a CBP watch commander at the Minneapolis Service Port. “That saves us a great deal of time, allowing us to search each vehicle in just seven to ten minutes,” an important aspect when you consider the hundreds

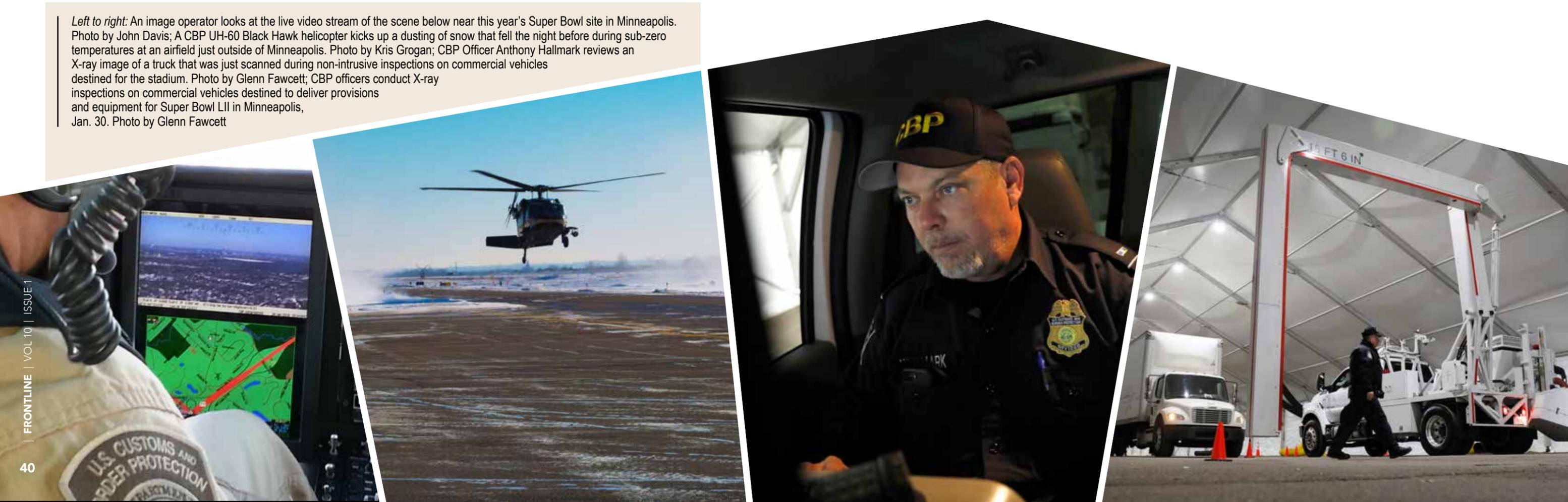
of vehicles that the port of entry checks every day.

The large X-ray machine scans both sides of large items, including semis and cargo containers and usually is used at ports of entry. It’s able to detect anything from big, hidden compartments down to small packages or even something as small as a handgun. It even detects people being smuggled in a trailer or vehicle.

The smaller, vehicle-mounted scanner does basically the same thing, but fits in a box on the back of a truck and scans just one side of a vehicle. It works well in the cold, perfect for the Super Bowl’s cold weather location this year.

“The operators and their experience – knowing what to look for and knowing what doesn’t look right – really makes the difference in identifying what’s in a shipment,” Durand said, adding that once some kind of anomaly is found, it’s up to CBP officers on the ground to dig in and find it.

*Left to right:* An image operator looks at the live video stream of the scene below near this year’s Super Bowl site in Minneapolis. Photo by John Davis; A CBP UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter kicks up a dusting of snow that fell the night before during sub-zero temperatures at an airfield just outside of Minneapolis. Photo by Kris Grogan; CBP Officer Anthony Hallmark reviews an X-ray image of a truck that was just scanned during non-intrusive inspections on commercial vehicles destined for the stadium. Photo by Glenn Fawcett; CBP officers conduct X-ray inspections on commercial vehicles destined to deliver provisions and equipment for Super Bowl LII in Minneapolis, Jan. 30. Photo by Glenn Fawcett





Left to right: Lee Takaki, a supervisory CBP officer in Minneapolis, examines a counterfeit Minnesota Vikings jersey at an express consignment carrier facility not far from the site of Super Bowl LII, Jan. 29. Photo by Glenn Fawcett; Recently confiscated counterfeit Super Bowl rings rest in the palms of a CBP officer in Minneapolis, Jan. 31. Photo by Glenn Fawcett; Brian Larson, a CBP officer from Minneapolis, goes through packages at an express carrier consignment facility near the site of this year's Super Bowl. Photo by Glenn Fawcett; With snow falling and temperatures near zero, a U.S. Border Patrol agent from Laredo, Texas, directs a driver to a secure area so the car can be scanned by a CBP non-intrusive inspection truck before entering the Super Bowl stadium area on Feb. 4. Photo by Kris Grogan

Long before the trucks arrived in the northern city, CBP was protecting the intellectual property rights of merchandise on its way to the big game.

“See, look at the stitching here,” said Helene Warren-Cutler, a senior import specialist with more than 30 years’ experience sent from Philadelphia as part of CBP’s Apparel, Footwear and Textile Center of Excellence and Expertise. Working at an express consignment center near the Minneapolis airport, she’s looking at a knock-off of a Philadelphia Eagles jersey, and the facility is just a stone’s throw from the site of this year’s Super Bowl. “It’s all uneven, and you can see the leftover paper between the spaces on the backside of the lettering.”

She also noticed a shirt collar label that’s not even close to what is on officially licensed National Football League merchandise. Even the holographic NFL label on the paper tag doesn’t look quite right. The holographic image doesn’t reflect as it should under a scanner, so even that tag is a fake. This jersey

hit the trifecta of telltale signs: bad stitching, bad label, and bad hologram.

During the past year, CBP has partnered with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement-led Operation Team Player, a crackdown on counterfeit sports apparel and merchandise imports. In a news conference just days before the game, DHS officials announced that in the past year they seized more than 170,000 counterfeit sports-related items worth an estimated \$15.69 million, and joint investigations led to 65 arrests with 24 convictions. In addition, CBP has launched a public awareness campaign in airports around the country, displaying ads in passenger terminals with messages to warn travelers about the dangers of purchasing counterfeit goods.

“Disrupting the sale of counterfeit merchandise and counterfeit tickets helps ensure an authentic game day experience for all fans,” said NFL Vice President of Legal Affairs Dolores DiBella. “The NFL remains

committed to consumer protection efforts year-round, and this collaboration with law enforcement is essential for every organization engaged in the fight against counterfeiting.”

Long before any of the merchandise hits the vendors’ tables in Minneapolis – and even before it arrives at the express shipper in the Twin Cities – CBP has people checking its authenticity when it first arrives in the U.S. Bob Redes, the acting assistant port director for trade operations at New York’s JFK Airport, said the first and second clues that something is fake could be where it’s coming from and where it’s going. It’s what helped tip off Warren-Cutler to check the package in the first place.

“The No. 1 way we target and look for counterfeit goods is looking at the country of origin – China, Hong Kong,” Redes said. If a large quantity of items, such as jerseys – the top counterfeit item among NFL merchandise – are going to a private residence,

then that’s another sign. “If it’s a lot going to an apartment or house, we’ll hold something like that to see what it is.”

Another clue is its value.

“People might be paying five to ten dollars apiece for a counterfeit NFL championship ring,” said Philip Spataro, chief CBP officer at the Miami International Mail Facility. “The real rings have diamonds or rubies and gold, so you’re not going to see a real one that cheap.”

Spataro added some legitimate merchandise only comes into specific ports. So if, for example, a Super Bowl hat comes through his facility and it’s supposed to come through only at the Port of New Orleans, that’s another sign it’s probably a fake.

Redes said interrupting the flow of phony goods also interrupts the flow of cash for criminal and even possibly terrorist operations. He said his office at JFK takes probably \$40 million worth

of counterfeit merchandise off the streets each year. “There’s a lot of money that can be made in counterfeiting. We’re on the frontline of protecting intellectual property rights.”

Across the country, CBP made more than 34,000 seizures of counterfeit goods last year, worth nearly \$1.2 billion.

CBP leadership recognized the teamwork.

“Collaborative efforts like Operation Team Player put the health and safety of the American people and the vitality of our economy first,” said CBP Commissioner Kevin McAleenan. “CBP is proud to partner with ICE, the Intellectual Property Rights Center and local authorities to ensure businesses and consumers are protected from intellectual property thieves.”

As kickoff approached, 40 Border Patrol agents from around country came to Minneapolis to help provide an extra layer of security, working with local police departments. Agent Dan Reed from Detroit was one of those assigned to ride along on and secure the buses that took fans from the official NFL pre-game tailgating party to the stadium.

“We transferred about 9,000-10,000 people,” Reed said. “There were agents posted on every bus for

several hours before the game. During the game, we provided perimeter security outside the stadium.”

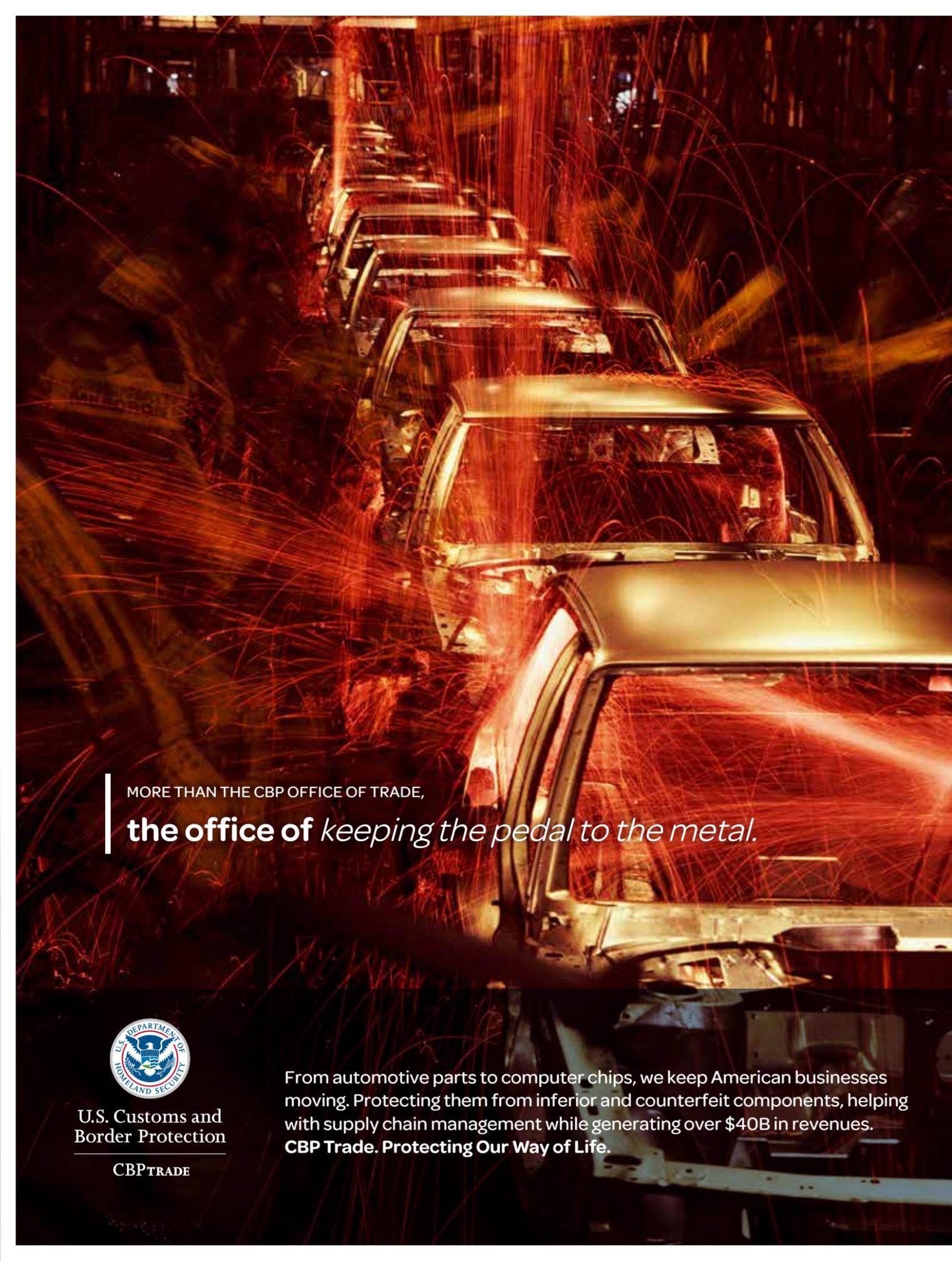
Living and working in the Border Patrol’s Detroit sector, Reed is no stranger to the cold, although the 5-below-zero temps by the end of the game made for a bone-chilling workday, even for him. His fellow agents from southern regions, such as Texas and Arizona, were shocked by what was reported to be the coldest Super Bowl site in history (although the actual game was played inside). But the reception from fans of both the Eagles and Patriots did a lot to warm their hearts.

“There was a ton of appreciation from the fans. They knew why we were here,” Reed said. “There were a lot of questions about my dog (although the dog wasn’t there) because of the K-9 patch I wear on my uniform. A lot of ‘thank yous’ from the fans.”

Reed said he also appreciated the camaraderie shared with Minneapolis and St. Paul police. “It’s always a good experience to work with other law enforcement officers.”

As the last of the confetti fell and fans made their ways home from an exciting, drama-filled game, team CBP was honored to keep the drama inside the stadium. 📷

Fake Super Bowl LII souvenirs are displayed during a press conference highlighting Operation Team Player ahead of Super Bowl LII. NFL officials discussed how to identify items that violate intellectual property rights. Photo by Glenn Fawcett



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# PHOTO FROM THE FIELD

Photo by:  
Tim Kuenstler  
Border Patrol Agent  
U.S. Border Patrol  
Spokane, Washington

Border Patrol's Tactical Unit (BORTAC) is now using all-terrain vehicles to traverse the remote landscape of Spokane County, Washington.

Submit your photos to [frontline@cbp.dhs.gov](mailto:frontline@cbp.dhs.gov)





## AROUND THE AGENCY



President Donald Trump attends a briefing about illegal immigration and illicit drug smuggling with U.S. Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Kevin McAleenan at CBP's National Targeting Center in Sterling, Virginia, Feb. 2. DHS photo by Jetta Disco

### President Trump Praises Work of National Targeting Center, Promises More Support

By John Davis

A strong nation requires secure borders, and U.S. Customs and Border Protection's National Targeting Center is a key part of the border security mission. That was the message President Donald Trump delivered Feb. 2 to the people working at the center in Sterling, Virginia.

"This is quite a facility," the president told a group, which included Secretary of Homeland Security Kirstjen Nielsen, CBP's Commissioner Kevin McAleenan, CBP officers, Air and Marine and Border Patrol agents, senior officials from the Departments of Justice and State, as well as members of the press. "These are the men and women [those at the National Targeting Center] that really know what's happening and know how to keep America safe. They're real professionals."

After a tour of the facility, President Trump called for tougher enforcement of immigration laws, in particular, against the drug smugglers the center helps to target. Commissioner McAleenan briefed the president that illegal immigration numbers dropped in the first few months shortly after his inauguration, primarily due to the administration's tougher immigration stance. Fiscal Year 2017 marked a 45 year low in U.S. Border Patrol apprehensions. However, increases in illegal border crossing attempts since then has prompted concern.

"We've seen a marked increase in hardened smugglers attempting to bring hard narcotics across our borders and into our communities," said Commissioner McAleenan. "We've had increases in every category: cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and obviously fentanyl, a very significantly potent synthetic opioid involved in so many overdoses in the United States."

Officers at the border and ports of entry check more than 1 million travelers and \$6.3 billion worth of imported products on average every day. The sheer volume of that traffic – ranging from

cargo containers to mail and express consignment packages to individuals crossing the border – makes it impossible to inspect every entry. The center uses CBP's own seizure analysis and intelligence information, along with data gathered from other federal, state and local law enforcement sources, to target travelers and cargo that pose the highest risk to U.S. security, including the threat of illegal immigration and drugs. CBP also partners with the U.S. Postal Service and commercial express carriers to target possible contraband coming into the country.

In addition to promoting efforts to address illegal immigration, including funding to build and enhance a border wall, the president repeated his commitment to give those who protect the nation's borders the tools they need to get the job done.

"We've really put a lot behind [the National Targeting Center], and we're going to be putting a lot more behind it," added President Trump. 

President Donald Trump discusses border security with CBP Commissioner Kevin McAleenan, Acting Border Patrol Chief Carla Provost, and San Diego Border Patrol Sector Chief Patrol Agent Rodney Scott during a visit to the border wall prototypes and mockups. DHS photo by Jetta Disco



## President Trump visits border wall prototypes

### Replacement wall construction underway in El Centro

By John Davis

Walls work and are vital to the integrity of the nation.

That was the message President Donald Trump delivered to the public after reviewing U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s wall prototypes on the border in Otay Mesa, California.

“If you don’t have a wall system, we’re not going to have a country,” said President Trump as he toured the eight, 30-foot high border wall prototypes and mock-ups.

Following construction of eight border wall prototypes, CBP tested, assessed and evaluated the

features and attributes of each prototype to identify which of them most effectively impede and deny illegal crossings. The assessment and evaluation included testing the eight wall prototypes, input from Border Patrol agents and an engineering analysis.

The President was joined by Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen, CBP Commissioner Kevin McAleenan, Acting U.S. Border Patrol Chief Carla Provost and San Diego Sector Chief Patrol Agent Rodney Scott.

President Trump asked Scott, a veteran agent who was in the same area more than 25 years ago, what was the situation before the existing walls were constructed.

“There was effectively no border in San Diego,” said Scott. “It was a chaotic situation,” adding the current fence, made of scrap metal, has at least helped in deterrence. “It changed our environment. We decreased illegal cross-border traffic by 95 percent.”

President Trump said the new wall will improve the Border Patrol’s ability to secure the border even further. “When we put up the real wall, we’ll stop 99 percent, maybe more than that.”

Scott added the current barrier has also helped economic development on both sides of the border.

“They re-established law and order in San Diego when they put up a wall,” said President Trump.

As the President visited the prototypes today, construction workers continued their work in El Centro, California, to replace 2.25 miles of the old barrier. Located about two hours East of Otay Mesa, the new wall will be 30-foot high. The project also includes around 2.25 miles of unpaved roads.

The wall replacement is one of Border Patrol’s highest priority projects.

The barrier was built in the 1990s out of recycled scraps of metal and old landing mat, steel pads once used by the military as landing platforms for helicopters.

Although the existing wall has proven effective at deterring unlawful cross border activity, human and drug smuggling organizations damaged and breached this makeshift version of a border wall several

hundred times during the last two years, resulting in costly repairs.

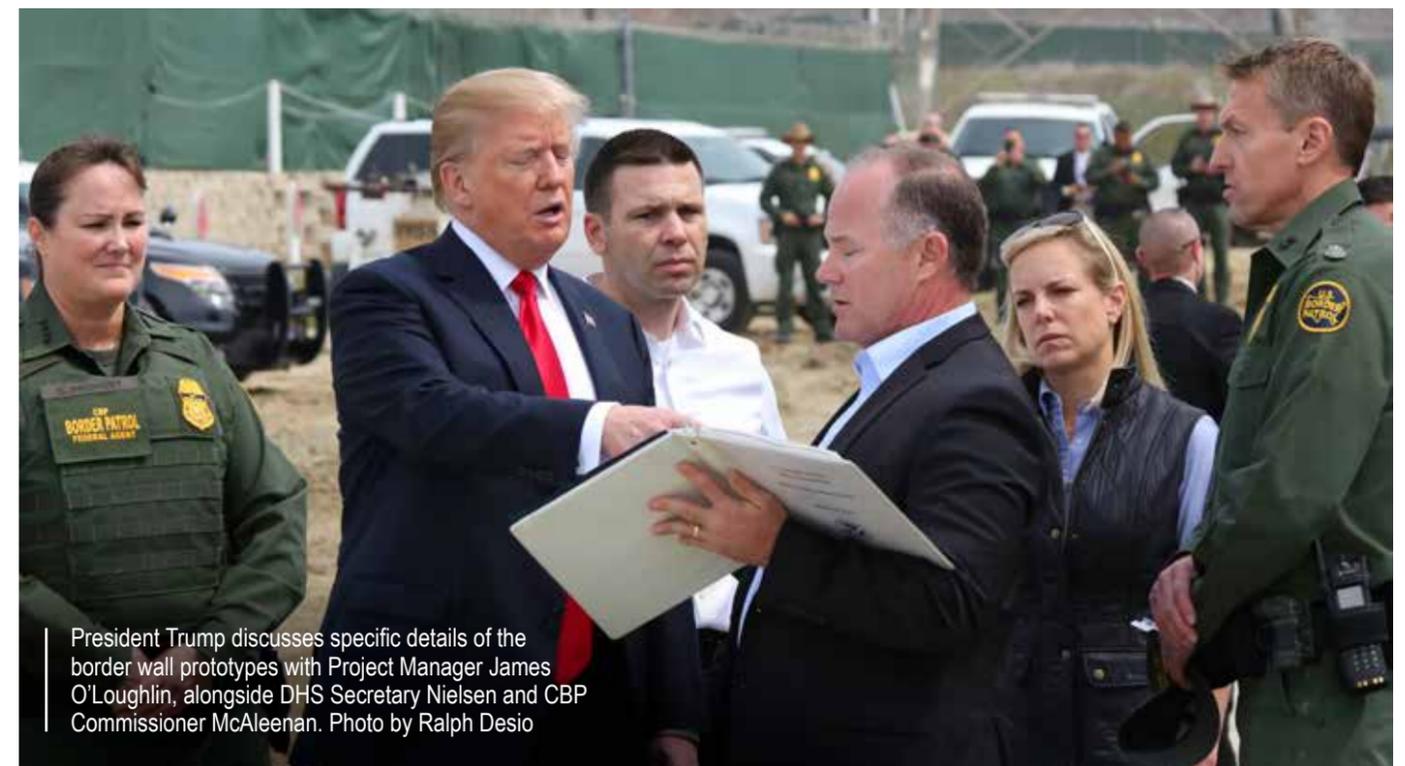
El Centro Sector continues to experience a high number of apprehensions of illegal immigrants and drug smuggling. In fiscal year 2017, the El Centro Sector apprehended 18,633 illegal aliens, seized 5,554 pounds of marijuana, 483 pounds of cocaine, 1,526 pounds of methamphetamine and 2,521 ounces of heroin. During that fiscal year, there were 21 assaults against El Centro Sector agents.

The construction of bollard wall design maintains agents’ visibility and better ensures their safety as they patrol along the border.

The President and Secretary Nielsen expressed their appreciation for what CBP and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement have done in the area.

“CBP and ICE put their lives on the lines every day to protect our country,” said Secretary Nielsen. “For that, I’m forever grateful. We will build this wall.”

“I want to thank ICE and the Border Patrol agents for their incredible work,” said President Trump. “It’s a dangerous job; it’s a tough job. We’ve cut down on border crossing because of what the Border Patrol has done.”



President Trump discusses specific details of the border wall prototypes with Project Manager James O’Loughlin, alongside DHS Secretary Nielsen and CBP Commissioner McAleenan. Photo by Ralph Desio



Alaska Area Port Director Lance Robinson, accepts the Governor's North Star Award for International Excellence recognizing Alaska's OFO staff and officers. Presenting the award is Debbie Morgan from Alaska's Office of International Trade.

## Alaskan Governor honors Office of Field Operations

By Paul Koscak, photos by Jerry McGee

Alaska may be America's last frontier, but it's also a state of big enterprise and CBP's Office of Field Operations has been at the forefront of some of the state's biggest projects. From pipelines to rail lines, from international partnerships to efficient and friendly incoming traffic processing, OFO has made its mark.

"We're Alaskans too," Alaska Area Port Director Lance Robinson said. "We want to see business succeed."

OFO's long-time guidance and support to local officials and its commitment to move the state's economy ahead didn't go unnoticed. In January, Alaska Governor Bill Walker presented CBP with the Governor's North Star Award for International Excellence. Considering the agency's modest footprint—just 86 CBP officers and 98 OFO staff to cover nearly 600,000 square miles—the recognition is truly significant.

### Taking care of business

OFO participates in Alberta to Alaska, better known as A2A. It's an ambitious project to build

an 800-mile railroad to transport bitumen, a black petroleum goo from the oil sands of Fort McMurray, Alberta, to Delta Junction, Alaska. Bitumen, which can be as thick as cold molasses or as hard as a hockey puck, will then be loaded on ships in Anchorage, exported to Asia and refined into oil.

OFO supports Alaska's partnership with China with timely clearances. The venture aims to construct a pipeline to bring natural gas 800 miles from the North Slope's Prudhoe Bay along the Arctic Ocean, to the coast near Anchorage. There, it will be liquefied and shipped to Asia.

On another international project, OFO is working with Canadian customs officials to improve the Alcan reporting station. Alcan sits isolated along the Alaska Highway at the Yukon border, 300 miles from Fairbanks, the nearest major city and 90 miles from Tok, the nearest town.

The place is so remote, the 12 CBP officers who work there and their families live in a self-contained compound at the station. They make a major food run to Fairbanks about once per month.

"We're fully enclosed," Robinson said. "We have our own power, our own water, our own satellite internet."

OFO is weighing a joint U.S.-Canadian reporting station so resources such as X-ray machines and other equipment can be shared and shifts could double—from two to four officers.

Servicing Alaska's immense territory—twice the size of Texas—also means working in some of North America's harshest conditions. With few daylight hours, winter temperatures can remain well below zero for weeks. Summers can hit sweltering triple digits. Community isolation is prolific.

Alaska's lack of roads and docks make inspections challenging. It may require flying to a small airfield then a long drive to a port, then taking a skiff to reach the anchored vessel and a climb up the side of the ship by ladder.

"We have the greatest caliber of employees," Robinson remarked. "We get 20 compliments to one complaint. You couldn't ask for better employees. It takes a special kind of person to be here."

And not just because of the environment. Since there's no permanent Border Patrol or Air and Marine Operations presence, OFO handles those duties as well. That's done through partnerships with other federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement. **▣**



From left, Alaska Area Port Director Lance Robinson and Kelly Johnson, an A2A attorney, review maps in planning for an 800-mile railway to transport bitumen from Alberta to Alaska. Next to Johnson is former Lt. Gov. Mead Treadwell.



The border literally cuts through the vast wilderness between Yukon and Alaska.



The Alcan reporting station is a self-contained community with a residential compound for officers and their families.

## CBP plays the ACE card, achieves long-term goal

By Marcy Mason

From a trade operations perspective, it was a major milestone for U.S. Customs and Border Protection. In February, CBP completed the final step in automating its cargo processing system, the Automated Commercial Environment or ACE. The system, which was launched more than 15 years ago, was designed to speed up the U.S. import/export process by reducing the processing and approval times of shipments. Not only did ACE eliminate duplicative and burdensome paperwork, it also provided a “single window” that allows businesses to electronically transmit the data required by the U.S. government to import or export cargo.

“ACE has been one of the most complex information technology projects ever undertaken by the federal government,” said CBP Commissioner Kevin McAleenan. “It required strong partnerships and collaboration across government and industry.”

When ACE was initially conceived in 1993, it was an outgrowth of the Customs Modernization Act, which gave the U.S. Customs Service, one of CBP’s legacy agencies, authorization to modernize its practices. This was done so that the agency could operate more effectively with businesses that had already automated and modernized their importing processes. The new program was intended to help the U.S. government collect duties, analyze and assign risk, and process international shipments coming in and out of the country.

Development of the new system was slow because of multiple challenges. “It was a constantly changing environment,” said Brenda Smith, the executive assistant commissioner of CBP’s Office of Trade. “It was no longer just about collecting revenue. We had to be able to identify and manage terrorism threats, import safety threats, and ensure compliance with free trade agreements, which have exploded over the last 10 years. At the same time, we were building

the automated systems under some very challenging budget constraints.”

But over the last six years, ACE experienced a dramatic turnaround. Buoyed by the strength of political support, additional funding, and a herculean effort by those involved, ACE’s core trade processing capabilities catapulted to completion. To date, more than 5.3 million lines of code were developed to automate all phases of cargo processing and 269 forms have been automated across CBP and its 47 partner government agencies.

Furthermore, the benefits of ACE are materializing. “While it has been a long road from planning to implementation, a streamlined import and export processing system has already proven to be a tremendous benefit for international trade,” said Commissioner McAleenan. “During fiscal year 2017, CBP realized an estimated \$28 million in processing efficiencies and industry achieved an estimated \$52 million in savings.”

Likewise, ACE has resulted in many improvements including a 44 percent reduction in wait times for truck processing at land ports of entry and 68 times faster processing of bonds. “The completion of core trade processing in ACE marks a monumental milestone for CBP, the culmination of many years of dedicated partnership and innovation from government employees and the trade community,” said Smith. “Through ACE, federal agencies have earlier, automated visibility to ship data, expediting their import or export assessments at the border, which, in turn, speeds the flow of legitimate trade and improves the security, health, and safety of cargo.”



Photo by Glenn Fawcett |



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BORDER PATROL AGENTS



CBP OFFICERS



AIR AND MARINE AGENTS



We steadfastly enforce the laws of the United States while fostering our nation's economic security through lawful international trade and travel.

## Office of Trade

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has direct responsibility for enhancing U.S. economic competitiveness. By reducing costs for industry and enforcing trade laws against counterfeit, unsafe, and fraudulently entered goods, CBP is working to enable legitimate trade, contribute to American economic prosperity, and protect against risks to public health and safety.

CBP uses all of its authorities to combat trade fraud by detecting high-risk activity, deterring non-compliance, and disrupting fraudulent behavior. A range of enforcement actions are used to punish criminal violators to the fullest extent of the law.

CBP coordinates with U.S. industries, 47 U.S. agency partners, and foreign governments to detect anomalies, trends, and violations in the global supply chain to target high-risk shipments and promote compliance.



U.S. Customs and  
Border Protection