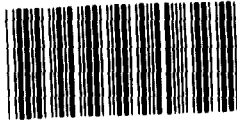


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STATEMENT OF
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GENERAL GOVERNMENT DIVISION
BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT INFORMATION,
JUSTICE, AND AGRICULTURE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
ON
THE NEED FOR IMPROVED INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES
TO SUPPORT DRUG INTERDICTION PROGRAMS

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

We are pleased to be here, at your request, to participate in hearings on the need for better intelligence information to support Federal drug interdiction efforts. Our testimony today is based on information contained in our recently released report on Federal drug interdiction efforts. 1/ The need to improve the quality and timeliness of intelligence data to support Federal drug interdiction efforts is one of the major issues addressed in our report.

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1/"Federal Drug Interdiction Efforts Need Strong Central Oversight," (GAO/GGD-83-52, June 13, 1983).

The effectiveness of Federal interdiction efforts depends a great deal on intelligence support capabilities. If accurate, timely tactical intelligence is available on drug smugglers, chances are good that Customs or the Coast Guard can make the interdiction. Statistics on the use of intelligence to support interdiction, as well as certain special projects, such as Operation Tiburon III, indicate the value of good, timely intelligence.

Drug source and transit countries are valuable sources of intelligence that can be used to support interdiction efforts. Since Customs and the Coast Guard do not have the authority to gather intelligence data overseas, they must rely on DEA to provide this intelligence. DEA's foreign intelligence program, however, does not place a high priority on developing intelligence that can be used to support interdiction efforts.

Some intelligence processing and analysis has been centralized here at the El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC). But, EPIC could be more effective if the agencies involved in drug interdiction provided the Center more support and used its data to better advantage.

INTELLIGENCE IMPROVES
INTERDICTION'S EFFECTIVENESS

Having intelligence about the time and place drug shipments are to take place greatly improves an agency's ability to interdict. However, such instances are rare. More often gathering of intelligence consists of analyzing individual pieces of

intelligence from a variety of sources in order to narrow the choices of where to deploy resources to effect a drug seizure.

The value of intelligence to support interdiction is shown by our analysis of Customs' information on drug seizures. More than one-half (55 percent) of all major seizures of drugs involved intelligence developed prior to the movement of the drugs, while only 7 percent of smaller seizures involved prior information.

Our analysis of seizures made during special enforcement operations also demonstrates the value of good intelligence. For example, results from Operation Tiburon III, a combined Coast Guard/DEA effort to attack drug smuggling by vessels in the Caribbean, show that almost two-thirds of the 70 vessels seized in the operation had been previously identified as suspected smugglers based on intelligence information.

MORE SOURCE AND TRANSIT COUNTRY
TACTICAL INTELLIGENCE NEEDED

Tactical intelligence to support interdiction can be gathered domestically or overseas. Clearly, intelligence from drug source or transit countries is especially useful for the deployment of interdiction resources. However, development of overseas intelligence is not under the control of Customs or the Coast Guard, but is the responsibility of DEA. This responsibility was assigned to DEA by Reorganization Plan #2 of 1973.

Except for a few special interdiction projects, DEA has provided only limited intelligence. For example, an analysis of drug seizures made by Customs and Coast Guard from September 1976 through June 1982 shows that of those seizures which involved prior intelligence only 14 percent involved intelligence from DEA.

Another indicator of the limited amount of foreign intelligence generated is our analysis of the source of information contained in EPIC's data base. Most intelligence developed by DEA that is provided to Customs and the Coast Guard comes through EPIC. We analyzed EPIC's records for a sample of 46 aircraft and 39 vessels. These files contained 514 items of information; only 30 (5.8 percent) came from DEA's foreign operations.

DEA officials agreed that more intelligence in support of interdiction efforts is desirable but pointed out that the generation of more intelligence is constrained by limitations on its foreign staff. They also stated that the development of interdiction intelligence is only one of their numerous overseas drug enforcement responsibilities.

EPIC--AN UNDERUTILIZED RESOURCE

Mr. Chairman, EPIC is a valuable resource that needs to be better supported and utilized by the participating agencies. The success of drug interdiction efforts depends heavily on the intelligence base supporting them. Even though EPIC was created

to centralize information on drug smuggling, it is not being fully supported by participating agencies.

As you know, Mr. Chairman, EPIC was established in 1974 as an interagency clearinghouse for southwest United States border intelligence information. Initially a DEA and Immigration and Naturalization Service operation, EPIC has been expanded both in number of participating agencies and geographical scope. In addition to DEA and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, Federal agencies now participating in EPIC are Customs; the Coast Guard; Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms; U.S. Marshal's Service; Federal Aviation Administration; Internal Revenue Service; and the FBI.

There is little argument about the overall value of a centralized multiagency intelligence center. EPIC's tactical intelligence support and intelligence products have aided interdiction efforts. Participant agencies have utilized EPIC more each year since it was established in 1974.

Both our interviews with agency officials and our analysis of information in the EPIC system demonstrate the value of the center. For example, Coast Guard officials said that before they board any vessel thought to be smuggling drugs they query EPIC to determine whether any information on the vessel is available. They noted that often EPIC has information on the vessel. Customs air patrol officials also thought that EPIC was useful. Miami Air Support Branch personnel said they contact

EPIC several times a day to place "aircraft lookouts" or to determine what information is available on specific aircraft.

Also, we queried the EPIC system to determine whether information was available on a sample of 75 vessels and 56 aircraft that had been seized by Customs or the Coast Guard during the 15-month period ended December 1981. Of these 131 vessels and aircraft, significant information 2/ was in the EPIC system for 38, or 30 percent, prior to their seizure. However, information is not available that shows whether EPIC data was actually used to assist in the interdiction.

Even though EPIC receives a substantial amount of intelligence information, not all such information generated by interdiction agencies is provided to EPIC. EPIC officials told us that while some information is transmitted to EPIC in the form of DEA investigative reports, Customs' Memorandums of Information Received, and Coast Guard Reports of Investigation, other information is not given to EPIC. We could not determine the specific amount of information that is not sent to EPIC. However, we analyzed EPIC's information to see if the seizure of the 131 vessels and aircraft previously mentioned had been reported to EPIC. Our rationale was that if these seizures had

2/Significant information includes items such as lookouts placed on the vessel, sighting reports, and specific arrival, departure and destination information.

not been reported to EPIC, then it was likely that other information had not been provided to EPIC. Our analysis showed that of the 131 vessels and aircraft seized only 56, or 43 percent, had been reported to EPIC.

To improve the overall coordination of interdiction intelligence activities and strengthen the quality of that intelligence we recommended in our report that the various agencies re-emphasize to their staffs the importance of promptly reporting all information on drug smuggling to EPIC and provide additional staff to EPIC. It is our understanding that both the Departments of Justice and Treasury have since assigned additional staff to EPIC or are in the process of doing so.

We also recommended that the Coast Guard and Customs Service transfer certain intelligence functions to EPIC. The agencies disagreed, noting that the intelligence functions involved only part of the time of one staff member or that the staff involved did not deal exclusively with drugs. We continue to believe, however, that the drug interdiction intelligence programs of all agencies will benefit by concentrating at EPIC those intelligence and analysis functions that are similar and that relate specifically to drug interdiction.

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In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, we believe drug interdiction intelligence programs of all agencies need to be improved. DEA

needs to better support interdiction efforts by developing intelligence from drug source and transit countries and all participating agencies need to better support and utilize EPIC. Clearly, a better intelligence program is one way that drug interdiction can be improved without major new expenditures of Federal funds.

That concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. We will be happy to answer any questions for you or other members of the subcommittee.