

DEA Museum Lecture Series – An Overview of the El Paso Intelligence Center –
12-1-2011

00:00:30 Host: If I could ask everyone to take their seats, we're going to get started this morning. Good day and welcome to all of you joining us as we continue the DEA Museum Fall Lecture Series, both here in our auditorium, but also joining us live on the Internet.

We are co-hosting this fall series on the DEA Intelligence Program and co-hosting with the Division of Intelligence. I want to thank the chief of Intelligence, Rodney Benson, as well as Doug Poole, and especially Marilyn Wankel and Catie Drew, who put together this fall series.

00:01:06 Today, we're looking back at the inception of and the evolution of the El Paso Intelligence Center. We want to first take care of two quick housekeeping items. For those of you here in the auditorium, if I could ask you to please silence your cell phones and pagers and BlackBerrys and iPhones and iPads out of courtesy both to our speakers, as well as your fellow attendees.

00:01:30 And then second, if I could ask you to please hold your questions. There will be a period for questions from the audience at the end of the program. And if I could also ask you to wait for a microphone to come to you so that we have the audio of your question for those who are watching live out on the Internet.

Let me introduce our two speakers as we get going this morning. The first is Section Chief Intelligence Analyst Larry Villalobos. He is the section chief of the Research and Analysis Section at the El Paso Intelligence Center, otherwise known as EPIC, in El Paso, Texas.

00:02:03 This is a section that's comprised of approximately 150 multi-agency special agents, analysts and researchers from DEA, Homeland Security, the FBI, ATF, state and local police, as well as elements from the Department of Defense.

He is a native of El Paso, Texas. He has also worked for the FBI, as well as the Texas Department of Public Safety. His DEA tours of duty have included the El Paso Intelligence Center, DEA Mexico Country Office in Mexico City, the DEA Tucson Office, and now back to El Paso.

00:02:42 Also joining him is Assistant Chief Patrol Agent Carlos Almengor, from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection. A native of Colorado, he has served 32 years with the federal government, starting with six years in the United States Air Force, before joining the United States Border Patrol in 1985 in Brownsville, Texas.

00:03:04 In 1995, he was promoted to supervisory Border Patrol agent, also in the El Paso sector. Then in 2004, he stood up the first-ever Border Patrol Field Intelligence Center, and in May of 2004, he was permanently promoted to assistant chief patrol agent. In 2007, he helped to create the Customs and Border Protections Office of Intelligence and Operations Coordination, and then in 2009 assigned to the El Paso Intelligence Center where he remains as deputy section chief for Research and Analysis.

00:03:38 Please join me in welcoming Larry Villalobos and Carlos Almengor.

Larry Villalobos: Good morning. I wanted to make sure and set I think the proper stage for what El Paso and EPIC is and what it's turned into. I think we want to take a look at it historically on how it began, and some of the things that we're doing in there in that facility at this time.

00:04:14 A lot of people who don't understand El Paso and what El Paso is, and the dusty streets of El Paso and everything that's in there, there's a lot of things that have

occurred throughout the years throughout that region that brought the center there the way it is today. And before I started in here I wanted to make sure that nobody got too upset about some of the things we wanted to talk about.

00:04:36 One of my previous stories in Mexico, I recall going into a place with some of my colleagues there at the embassy to visit and listen to a bunch of mariachis. Those are Mexican country singers in Mexico. And the mariachis that showed up looked pretty rugged. Usually, they're dressed up really nice and they're showmen material. But these particular guys looked like they had just ridden off the range from Chihuahua or Durango or someplace. Mustaches from here to Pittsburgh, dirty hats.

00:05:08 And they sang incredible music. And when they got up there and started singing their ballads, one of them hit his uniform that he was wearing, and dust flew out. It was really incredible. I told some of the people at work that I was going to come up here and I was going to drag my suit through some dust, or bring some talcum powder and hit my chest and watch that dust come up, so you all would get the feel and the flavor of El Paso and the dusty streets of areas where there used to be gunfighters and gunslingers all through that region. Because really the birth of EPIC, and the birth of what became of that area, was similar to that.

00:05:43 It starts back in the early '70s, probably around 1974. DEA was just being born as a new agency, when BNDD had joined up and all the different agencies had come together. But there were some real issues along the southwest border. DEA has always been an agency that used task forces that used a lot of people, partnered up with a lot of agencies to understand what the problems were, not only along the southwest border, but throughout the world.

00:06:14 And at this early stage in DEA's history, we already had offices in foreign countries. We had offices in Turkey, in Thailand, Hong Kong, in Panama, Mexico, Columbia. We had several offices, so we already knew a little bit about international

movement of drugs, international movement of narcotics, and the problems and the challenges we would have in different cities throughout the United States.

00:06:35 There was a mandate from the Department of Justice, a study that they wanted to establish a border center somewhere along the southwest border. DEA had already begun to look into problems that we were seeing throughout the United States and the threats that they were beginning to reap. And they had a plan, as DEA always has had. And they thought about putting together something that was called BRAIN, Border Regional Analytical and Intelligence Network.

00:07:04 And at that time the plan was to put up offices in Seattle, Los Angeles, San Diego, Boston and in Miami. And somewhere in the middle there, along the Texas border. They dispatched or deployed some people from headquarters from Washington to set up down there, and the first El Paso Intelligence Center was established as six desks in a seedy motel just outside of downtown El Paso.

00:07:31 These individuals were brilliant, really, when you think about what we're going to show you and how it is that they looked at some of the information that was going to be coming in there. This is 40 years ago. El Paso is a city now today probably close to two million people between El Paso and Ciudad Juarez across the border. It's bustling with international movement of commerce that comes across both sides of the border. But just east of El Paso, in an area called San Elizario, Texas, which is actually the initial El Paso seat and also, coincidentally, the area where the current cartel wars that have engulfed the state of Chihuahua and Ciudad Juarez actually began about six years ago.

00:08:13 It's about 30 miles east of El Paso, or, I'm sorry, about 15 miles east of El Paso and that was the county seat. To the west of El Paso, about 30 miles up the river, was the establishment of the first Fort Bliss. Again, to protect, from Homeland Security, that fort was established many, many years ago.

00:08:33 So, between these two areas, the city of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez grew and the problems with it, as well. The El Paso Intelligence Center, obviously, did not grow during that period as these two areas were beginning to be born, but the same concepts that existed in those areas of home defense, or home security, Homeland Security, and the problems that were passing through along the border, were very genuine and very real.

00:09:00 So, these individuals that started EPIC and went down there were probably people that were very experienced not only with systems, or at least at developing systems or intelligence, but they had to marry up with our special agents and the people who were already on the ground. Remember, the DEA was formed by BNDD agents, and a lot of Customs agents – legacy Customs agents that were already along the southwest border.

00:09:30 These were individuals who knew what was going on all along the southwest border. They knew who the people were, they knew how movement was coming across, they'd lived, they'd existed through there. If some of you ever run into some of these people, and visit down here at the museum, we refer to them, or they refer to themselves, as border rats. And they live there, they work there and they established an incredible program that still today we understand and look back to try and assist us in the work that we do along the southwest border.

So, these individuals come into this region, and they sit together. And if you listen to some of the stories spun by people in law enforcement history, they say that a US border patrolman, a Customs agents and a DEA agent probably sat together somewhere, maybe over a cold beer, and were discussing the unique problems of the southwest border as they were coming across sitting there.

00:10:16 How do we attack it? How do we find, how do we exchange intelligence? What can we do to partner up with the other agencies and everybody that's playing

along the southwest border? Well, the DEA had a plan and DEA deployed these people that came down here, early analysts that went down to that area.

00:10:35 I think probably the most incredible thing about several of these analysts that went down there, is they were all people from Naval Intelligence background. And these people had specific things that they looked at, specific I guess studies, if you will – operational intelligence type of activity that they were experienced in: surface vessels, submarines, things like that. And they began to apply what they had known and what they were successful at when they started their analytical programs.

00:11:04 And they looked exactly at everything that was along the southwest border and what they knew about drugs as it impacted the southwest border. And they said, well, there's drug categories, there's production, there's transportations, there's commerce and there's personalities. We know what the drug categories are that are impacting us. We really don't have anything to do with production. The commerce, I mean, the sale, yeah, we know what's going on, but still along the southwest border the drugs are actually coming in, so we want to attack probably the transportation.

00:11:33 Personalities – we're new at this. So, how are we going to listen to these people, how is it that we are going to identify these individuals. So, they sat down, again, these incredible people, and they came up with that EPIC should look at transportation and should look at surface, air, shipping and communications. Those were the first four disciplines that EPIC was looking at and, today, strangely enough, the same four disciplines that bother us and are a great interest to everybody.

00:12:01 The only problem is that today the threats are not just drugs, it's not just human smuggling, there's all kinds of other things that we have to look for. So, as we go through this presentation, what I'd like you all to take with you, really, is, is that the birth of EPIC was with these DHS components and DEA or DOJ, BNDD, as it was being born. But today in 2012, 2011, we've come full circle.

00:12:30 DHS is a huge partner of the El Paso Intelligence Center. My colleague, Carlos, will go into some of the programs that we're looking at – new programs there at the center. But most important, how it is that we started in that region, how we started in that area and became to what we are today. When they looked at what we were going to do, remember the DOJ in establishing EPIC –

00:12:59 In establishing EPIC in 1974, the DOJ mandate, a study, mandated that there should be joint personnel manning, sharing of information, common reporting that came into the cent, provide information to field agents, and of course operating a 24-hour watch. How do you go about doing that? How do you get everybody's information? What is it that you can see? Just before this mandate came out, the Rand Corporation was hired by the US government to look at the problem as we were seeing it now in Mexico.

00:13:30 Mexico at this point was beginning to export a lot of brown heroin. We had incredible people already in DEA and BNDD that had enormous amount of experience in worldwide heroin trafficking. In fact, the first EPIC director, Jacques Kiere, came from New York and had been involved in the French Connection investigation in his career. So, they brought it down here because Rand Corporation – I understand there might be something here in the DEA Museum. I've never seen it. They put out kind of a comic book.

00:14:00 Those of you old enough – there are some people in here that are quite young. But those of you who are old enough will remember that you can take a comic book that's drawn up and move the corner of it and there's an animation of it and you can actually see a cartoon developing in there by just flipping the pages. Rand Corporation put together this book that showed this cloud of brown heroin moving across the United States taking over the country, and it emanated in El Paso. So, when DEA saw this, they said, well, I think that that's where the first office of BRAIN that we want to set up should be down in El Paso.

00:14:36 The six desks in the seedy hotel of these analysts and these special agents started was born. And it worked so well that eventually they said we don't really need part of this BRAIN network in Miami, in Boston, in Los Angeles and everywhere else we had intended to do it. Because whatever these guys plan and decide to do down in El Paso is working quite well. So, that's how it all started, as best as we can tell.

00:15:01 In the early '70s – this is a picture of the early first watchers in there. And the incredible thinking about this watch, the initial location of it was in a building that sits right on the edge of the original boot hill in El Paso where all the gunfighters are buried. So, it was kind of an appropriate place if you're going to set up an intelligence center to look and read at some of the problems that are happening in that region, as an example of the crime and the criminal syndicate that has existed in that region for so long.

00:15:36 But this was the original Epic Watch Center. It had maybe about 15 manned areas. There was Coast Guard, and Customs agents, and DEA agents that sat out there and worked around the clock. It was a small building. What you see here is probably just the watch center and there was a small building to the rear of that, which was a technical operations center. And then downstairs was a small administrative area that was manned.

00:16:05 That center now has become pretty sophisticated and pretty complex. For those of you who have been there, you know what I'm talking about. It's now a huge, huge facility, the Watch Center, specifically, that has several individuals in there and monitored 24 hours a day. We'll talk more specifically about the watch operations. But it went from those six desks, it went to that initial center, and it came back to this sophisticated Watch Center that we have in there now.

00:16:35 We've also made obviously some advances in technical collection of some of the things we do and how we manipulate the information. What you see on the screen is a picture of one of the first manual computers, if you will. These are notch

cards – I think they were called a B system, where you could write – if you look all the way around that particular card, you have different categories of information.

00:17:00 And there were holes that you could punch in and notch out. And the individual would write the information that you wanted to display on that card in the middle of that card. You picked up those cards and, literally, like a knitting needle, went through these notches – because you had created these notches with this information that was available, and whatever cards fell out, these were your leads. And this is the information that you were able to sort out and follow. The El Paso Intelligence Center started this way.

00:17:31 There came some pretty incredible people that came through DEA that designed certain systems to be able to pull the information that we had out of [NATIS]. Because remember NATIS in those early days was probably just an indexing section, where we couldn't manipulate some of the information that we wanted to pull out of there. So, these guys came in here with very new and crude and rudimentary computer systems, microfiche, probably, and they designed some systems to be able to pull the information that EPIC was looking at in some of those categories that I talked about: air, smuggling, maritime smuggling for the areas along the southeastern part of the United States.

00:18:16 And we were able to pull information, use other agencies, FAA information on pilots, tail numbers and things like that that were being indexed in our system to be able to start creating lookouts and collecting this information and intelligence.

00:18:31 It wasn't something that was born overnight in terms of obviously what we are today, but it was something that consistently, there was agents and there were analysts that were coming in there dreaming up these programs and finding a better way to do it. I think I'm pretty good at saying that in DEA, anyway, we've always used task forces. We've always used the incredible ability of some of these people that didn't have a lot of money.

00:19:01 When I started working with DEA, we prided ourselves that DEA didn't have a lot of money to spend on a lot of programs, but we had a hell of a lot of agents and a lot of analysts that go out there and create information, or at least look for information and find information in certain ways that didn't exist anywhere else. And all those things came in together at the El Paso Intelligence Center began to work.

00:19:27 So, really from three agencies that were DEA, legacy INS, or the Immigration Naturalization Service, and the US Customs Service, the center was born. Today, we have 25 agencies. You can see them up there on the screen. These agencies are in there, they work in there. We have about 74 databases that are available to our analytical and agent staff. But more important, the people in that center and what they have become and what they've developed in pretty incredible in and of itself. In my section, I have special agents.

00:20:00 These are hybrid special agents that understand the work of a special agent, but have also developed some incredible work in the way that they manipulate databases and teach our analytical people how to retrieve the information that's needed to make these analytical projects, to do some of the things that we do there at the center and of course help and support our field elements.

Our center today is broken down – this is just a small area of what it is, but it has all the different sections that we have at the center that include information: management, a [unintelligible] section, which you'll hear about a little bit later in this presentation.

00:20:33 We got a couple of associate directors, the three directors, from DHS, from CBP, and the FBI. And the deputy director sitting under the director of the center, which is a DEA special agent. We have a Watch Operation Section and we have different program coordinators. All those agencies that I spoke about, those 21 agencies at El Paso, all have a representative from their parent agency and the coordinate the

programs, they make sure that the personnel that are coming into the building are received there at the center and are laid out to the different areas throughout the building and throughout the different sections.

00:21:12 The Research and Analysis Section contains the Southwest Border Unit, the Financial Targeting Unit, the Tactical Bulletins Unit, Special Projects Unit and the Bulk Currency Unit. Again, these are programs and these are units that have sprung up. Some have been there for many years, have had different names.

00:21:31 Financial Targeting at one time was Asset Identification. The Southwest Border Unit has had all kinds of different names. But each one of those units looks at something specific. The Southwest Border Unit does an intensive study of the individuals and personalities that exist along the southwest border that facilitate the movement of contraband coming north. Financial Targeting, or Asset Identification, we work with offices around the world, different agencies, all the agencies that participate at EPIC, state and local agencies.

00:22:03 We've partnered up with all 50 states that at the center. So, we work with them in trying to identify assets and identify leads, or strong financial leads in their investigations. Our Tactical Bulletins, many of you have received them on a regular basis. They're available for everybody. We look at the welfare of our law enforcement professionals, trends in smuggling, things like that.

00:22:30 They go all over the place. They're in great demand from some of our partners internationally where we sanitize and give the information to them, as well. We've got several things going on in here. In addition to all those agencies that are represented at the center, we have foreign liaison officers, as well. We have three individuals from the government of Mexico. One represents their PGR, or their Department of Justice. We have their police force, their SSP, represented there, and we have a military liaison officer there at the center.

00:23:00 We also have an individual from the Columbian National Police. So, all our analysts, all our agent personnel in the center have access to these individuals, as well. Whenever there's some clarification, whenever there is some key information that we're trying to look, we just go down the hall and talk to these individuals and discuss some of these requests and some of the information that we might need.

The Special Projects Unit has a lot of the programs, like the Tactical Bulletin, some of the other things that don't specifically fall into a specific unit, but are housed in that area.

00:23:34 And the newest is our Bulk Currency Unit. Our Bulk Currency Unit, as most of you are aware of the problem with bulk currency and the movement internationally and domestic in the United States is a huge problem, and a gap of intelligence exists there to try and exploit information we can get in the program. But the Bulk Currency Unit was housed at one point in Financial Targeting Unit. We've now partnered up with ICE.

00:24:00 ICE is now EPIC with the Bulk Currency Unit. They've brought in their Bulk Currency unit discipline that they had up in their center in Vermont, set it up in EPIC. And we're working together to try and identify and try to get the information and the intelligence, extract it from all that activity that occurs in the movement of bulk currency.

So, these are the programs in the general form that we have in there at the facility that have grown from those six desks, from those initial threats that they saw.

00:24:30 It's grown more of an operational view or an operational picture, of operational intelligence that we have at the center. It's not just a look at transportation, but rather a look specifically at all the threats that occur, and specifically transportation and movement of the personalities involved and how it is we can exploit whatever intelligence we have in there. Remember the El Paso Intelligence Center has existed now for 40 years. There's a collection now of 40 years of intelligence.

00:25:00 Again, the fathers of EPIC, the fathers of DEA that saw that we value in the information that was going to be collected there, started a process whereby anybody that contacts the center, that information is captured. And it's captured there for us to be able to de-conflict. It's captured there to refer special agents and other investigative bodies to each other when we touch on a bit of information that perhaps doesn't exist anywhere else. Aside from all the databases from the different government entities that participate with us, there is this internal base at EPIC with 30 years' worth of intelligence and 40 years of question and comments and calls into the center that we have in there that are really strong leads for something.

00:25:41 And as we like to tell our people that we work with on a consistent basis, include EPIC in those checks. Make sure that you touch there, contact us. Because you'd be surprised at the information that can come out of there that didn't appear in any other databases, simply because a highway stop from a state policeman in the state of Nebraska called in and had a bulk currency movement.

00:26:03 Well, that information probably resides in some type of Nebraska State Patrol records, but may not exist in any federal databases. But it would be at EPIC because that check was made there.

We're going to go into the different sections in there with my colleague, Carlos, and he'll take it over from here. And we'll answer some questions afterwards on any of the things that I've talked about, or anything from Research and Analysis. Carlos?

00:26:30 Carlos Almengor: Thank you, Larry. And I hope you all don't mind, but I'm going to stand in front of the podium. As you can see, I'm vertically challenged, for one, so standing behind the podium kind of gives me a disadvantage. And two, I'm very proud of what I'm wearing today because it's my dress uniform for the border patrol, which I am very proud of standing in front of you as a border patrol agent. But I'm even more proud to be part of the El Paso Intelligence Center.

And to reflect back on what Larry was saying, too, I'm glad he didn't put the powder on him and kind of shake it off because then I would hv2 compete with him and put my rough duty uniform on that would be ripped and torn boots and stuff where I've dived through fences and stuff.

00:27:05 So, we decided to dress up for you all. But to go right into the Watch Operation just a little bit – I am Larry's deputy section chief for Research and Analysis, but I've also been the acting section chief for the Watch for the last 90 days. So, I want to talk to you about the units that are within the Watch section. The first one is the Rail Targeting Unit. The Rail Targeting Unit is basically a new unit that just stood up probably about four months ago – roughly four months ago.

00:27:30 It's CBP-led. It's led by folks out at the National Targeting Center. And what we're basically doing – it's a new initiative – we're taking a look at all rail cars crossing the southwest border and focusing in on those.

The next one is a domestic highway enforcement program absolutely key to what we're doing there at EPIC. Because what we're basically doing there is the Watch is taking a look at all seizures throughout the United States – domestic highway seizures that happen throughout the United States – and bringing that information in and running in through analytical processes to come back to the border and find out where our vulnerabilities are.

00:28:09 The Maritime Watch. The Maritime Watch is actually the United States Coast Guard, DHS. And basically what they do is they do exactly what the general watch does which I'll speak of here in a little bit, but they run all checks for the coral waters law enforcement maritime folks out on the waters within the 12 miles of the United States.

00:28:30 They're capable of running complete EPIC [ten], complete record checks throughout EPIC for their partners on the water.

The Situation Awareness and Intelligence Unit. The Situation Awareness and Intelligence Unit, again, is CBP-led. We have a CBP program manager in charge of that and we're basically doing advanced analytical targeting and we're focus on all threats to include drugs, alien smuggling, alien trafficking, imposters, that type of stuff, all along the southwest border and now starting to switch our focus, as well, to the northern border.

00:29:05 We have the general watch. The general watch is what you saw in the photo that we showed you a little while ago. What they're basically entailed with is 24/7, 365 days a year, and they sit there and they answer phone calls from state, local and federal officers as they're in the action of an enforcement action, whether it be on the side of the highway, whether it be in a raid. But they're basically taking down the information and running what we call EPIC [tens] and they run checks for those officers.

00:29:32 And essentially what happens is the officer will call in, the watch officer will answer, they'll do an Epic ten. When they press to go button it runs against 14 databases that we have there. It immediately responds back and they are able to give that information back to that officer. If there's any ongoing investigations, or other enforcement actions throughout the United States and it's documented within the EPIC ten, we can immediately de-conflict that agent or that officer on the side of the road to know that there's something else going on and they need to be talking to some other agent of officer that could have something for them or them for the agent of officer.

00:30:05 We have the Gun Desk. It's run by ATF, the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Unit. And they're basically capable of running all of the ATF databases for any weapons or ammunition or explosives that are seized out there or checks that need to be happening for them. And it's not just national. I mean, we're talking globally. So, if

anybody calls from anywhere in the globe that's a vetted law enforcement officer, they'll get EPIC response to them.

00:30:33 And then we have the Military Sea Lift Command. The Military Sea Lift Command basically does what the Maritime Watch, but they respond to the global checks. So, if there's merchant seamen out there trying to get on United States flagged ships, they're able to run the record checks to ensure that those people who are getting on those ships are not terrorists or related to terrorists – have a nexus of terrorism.

00:31:00 Then we have the Border Intelligence Fusion Section. The Border Intelligence Fusion Section is, again, DHS-led. It's led by a SES intelligence analyst from DHS. He is also one of the associate directors for EPIC. And within that they have three units. Of course, they have the Analysis and Production Unit, and that unit takes all of the information that's gathered throughout all the other sections in EPIC and basically puts it together in a format for DHS and others that request that information.

00:31:39 And we have the [JTF] North Support Unit. And that's a DOD support element. As you might all be aware of, DOD is heavily involved in support to law enforcement, and that's their law enforcement support element that sits in there with the Border and Intelligence Fusion Section. And then they also answer to the Intelligence Support Unit any request that might come from law enforcement for any support from the intelligence community.

00:32:08 So, they handle all those requests, as well, and get them out.

These are the FY11 stats for the El Paso Intelligence Center. As you can see, we had well over 333,000 requests for information that we answered; over 18,000 case-supported and de-conflicted; close to 6,000 written products; approximately \$743,000 in assets identified, of which 841, or close to \$842,000 were seized.

00:32:51 And de-confliction, which leads into the next slide, which basically is the last slide. What we're basically seeing with EPIC is its increased connectivity. What EPIC is evolving into is really a de-confliction center. What I mean by that is through the immense databases that are in here – we already mentioned 74 databases that are in there, and all of the agencies that are in there, and all the capability that's in there, we are able to properly de-conflict and support every agency that's vetted and calls into EPIC. And be able to route, and create targeting folders, and targeting indicators for our agents and officers, whether it be DHS, whether it be all of DHS, whether it be ATF, whether it be DOJ entities.

00:33:46 And with that, that concludes our presentation, I'll open it up to questions. Again, I remind everybody that if you'll wait for a mike to come to you so we can get the question to the audience that's listening in.

00:34:01 Larry Villalobos: I just wanted to add that the El Paso Intelligence Center today is about 88,000 square feet. [unintelligible] – expansion to the building of about 25,000 square feet. We sit on about almost 32 acres on a military base and we have about 500 employees.

00:34:30 So, it's grown quite a bit over the years. We don't have enough room right now to get all the individuals that want to come in here from the different agencies. So, a lot of our disciplines within the building are being hot-seated. We got a couple of shifts going. Of course, the watch is around the clock, to be able to accommodate some of these bodies that are in there. So, quite a bit of growth in that facility, quite a bit of information that's flowing through there. It's only one of three buildings owned by the DEA.

00:35:00 It's DEA's building. And so there's a lot of things that are going on in there. I invite you all to come visit the center. Contact us with any information that you might have specific to what it is that we do there or general information from the center. Please come visit us. Questions?

Male Speaker: Yes. You mentioned you had some representatives from Mexico. Any plans to have representatives from other countries? Australia, other Latin American countries close to law enforcement officers at EPIC?

00:35:34 Larry Villalobos: There are plans to do so. We are constantly being contacted by our officers in other parts of the world. We host a lot of these officers that come in there. We had a Brazilian contingent that came in there in preparation for the Olympics there in Brazil that are being held up there next. So, they came into the facility to look at how it is that the information is exchanged to different agencies and how the different federal agencies in the United States work with each other.

00:36:04 We have had several visits here in the last few months from Canada, so our Canadian office in Ottawa is coordinating several visits in there. And they're beginning to ask a lot of questions from us. They see a lot of components in there that they didn't see or have access to in the past, specifically all the DHS components that we have there at the center. So, they want to reach out to them. They can see that they're there.

00:36:30 So, Canada has shown an interest. I am sure that some of the other countries that have come through there have probably approached DEA in some form. We expect probably in the future to have some more foreign counterparts, which is a great thing, as well. Questions?

Female Speaker: You mentioned that you have access to the report coming out of all the agencies, includes arrests that are going on. Do you have the complete report, let's say, for CBP at airports when they've arrested a courier?

00:37:09 Carlos Almengor: I'll answer that. Yes, we absolutely do. CBP and DHS, in general, brings all of its database structure to EPIC. The agents and officers that are

in there, well over 60 embedded into EPIC now, fully integrated within all of the sections and within all of the units.

00:37:31 Any time any other agency would like to know something about a subject or seizure or anything that CBP has in their hands, we share that information. So, the answer to your question is, yes, we have complete access to the complete reports.

Female Speaker: Who would you have to contact to get that complete information? What section, what person, do we contact to get the complete arrest information?

Carlos Almengor: If you have a request for information from EPIC, you should go to the Joint Collections Management unit at EPIC.

00:38:02 And there's actually an email address, it's called request.information.epic@usdoj.gov. Once it's properly vetted and properly authorized, we can get that information to you.

Male Speaker: You guys have been at EPIC for a long time. Talk a little bit about lessons learned from your years there, and what law enforcement in general has learned as EPIC has evolved.

00:38:36 Larry Villalobos: Well, EPIC has evolved and there's been a lot of lessons learned. I think like most all government entities, the lessons, or at least the events of 9/11 forced us all to look at things differently, to look at threats that were a little bit more different. I think the early part of my career, as government agencies we were all boxed into our own disciplines.

00:39:04 Border Patrol was doing their thing and Customs was doing theirs, DEA theirs. And it became apparent and very clear to everybody that we didn't have those answers. that every agency had a piece of it. I refuse to believe, as an analyst of so

many years with this agency, that the information or the gaps that exist out there are not there to be found.

I mean, they're there.

00:39:30 They either sit with CBP, they sit with some other DHS component, they sit with a DOJ component. And the minds and the abilities of analysts are such that they have to go out and get this information and close up those gaps. So, I think probably the biggest lesson that we learned in this region with the El Paso Intelligence Center was that there was a lot of entities and a lot of agencies that have a lot of information and a lot of ability that when they bring that makes the center, it makes the whole, a lot stronger.

00:40:01 And I think that everybody wins in that respect. Most recently in talking to some of my colleagues within DEA, and some of the specific things that they wanted to view or wanted to look at, or wanted to analyze, and by working with our DHS components it's a simple step to go in there and retrieve that information in ways that if we could show DEA analysts right from the beginning how these things were done, there'd be very few gaps that existed.

00:40:30 So, there's a lot of information, and information and the pipe to get that information in, what technology is today able to be able to bring that. And constantly we're having meetings and entertaining people that come in through there on how it is that we can make a system better. a system stronger. How can our various databases talk to each other, things like that. So, we're still learning in that respect. There's still all kinds of agreements as is the government to be done. But we're there and we work there.

00:41:02 And although perhaps maybe Network A doesn't talk to Network B, speaking IT, we know that we can go to Network A, or go to Network B, and get that information and pull that out. And until those things are married up and start working efficiently, at least we have access to them. So, a lot of challenges that occurred earlier.

I think there was a time – I can tell you for sure there was a time that the El Paso Intelligence Center was just humming and just moving, and not probably doing the things that we are very capable of doing, today.

00:41:38 A lot of things, a lot of events, have forced us into having to do – like I said, from 9/11, to our economic situation in the world and of course our partner abilities with other countries. So, that's very important. As we recognize a threat, as we began to see the threat, then we began to work with some of these areas. We have an incredible amount of people that are incredibly brilliant.

00:42:02 Everything from our contract analysts and data researchers who are incredible at the work they do, to these hybrid special agents that come and work there, to our watch officers, and the different agencies that are [represented], and our analysts. So, a lot of ability, a lot of capability and a lot of information that keeps growing and keeps coming.

DHS, and you worked at BORFIC, and some of the challenges that you had.

00:42:27 Carlos Almengor: I can speak from, as you heard when they introduced me, I was challenged, or I had the challenge of standing up the Border Patrol Field Intelligence Center in 2004, and we very quickly found out that we had our universe. Our universe was the Border Patrol Intelligence systems and stuff. And we were missing big pieces. We had immense gaps. And those gaps, when we merged into EPIC in 2009, minimized. We still have some gaps out there. It's like Larry referenced here, our system may not talk to System B and that kind of thing, but we have the interconnectivity of the actually agencies, the people, the analysts, the officers that are actually moving it.

00:43:05 I personally sit on the DHS Integrated Domain Awareness working group, representing EPIC. That was Mr. [Dody] who got me involved in that. So, we're moving along those lines. Of course, DEA is now working to create Border Link. And Border

Link is actually getting DHS wrapped into that, as well. So, I mean, there's a lot of things that have been – lessons learned. And we're moving ahead and pushing forward, adding value to the products that are coming out, adding value to the agents and officers in the field.

00:43:32 Me being one of those agents and officers in the field, knowing what's needed out there – and of course, as Larry mentioned earlier, we have hybrid agents. We have hybrid CBP officers and agents, as well, sitting in EPIC alongside our analysts, who can say, yes, this is what you need. So, yeah, it's been fantastic. Very proud to be there.

Female Speaker: Just a quick question. You mentioned that there's several agencies that compromise EPIC. Is there like a waiting list for other agencies wanting to join? And also foreign agencies wanting to join and is there a specific criteria that you look at.

00:44:16 Larry Villalobos: Well, they're agreements. There's agreements with these other agencies. I don't think there's a waiting list, but as more and more agencies visit – I saw Mr. Dody here a little bit ago, and Art was our previous director, and he has a knack for inviting thousands of people to the facility.

00:44:35 And we had a lot of visits from a lot of people who came in through there and every time they were exposed to some of the programs and they see it, they want a part of it. So, we've had people that have joined up, and then have left temporarily and now they want to come back. I'll give you an example. The Arizona Department of Public Safety, they were there for a little bit in some of the programs and some of the problems that they have, obviously, in the state of Arizona. And they left, but now they're wanting to come back.

00:45:00 They see the value of what a facility like EPIC can do. It really helps a lot of people, especially our state and local partners. As far as foreign counterparts and foreign countries, they work within the structure of our DEA offices abroad. They come

to visit the center. They're exposed to some of the programs that we have in there. They visit with us and talk to us. We have a very, very robust or aggressive presentation that we give to some of these individuals, so they can see what the capabilities are.

00:45:34 And of course, a lot of it are coordinated and designed by our own headquarters here in Washington. So, there is a lot of interest and a lot of people trying to get in there. I think there's a waiting list for personnel from existing agencies. Because there are a lot of entities here and a lot of agencies that want to bring in more people. I know that the US Marshall Service is bringing more analysts into it. We haven't had US Marshal Service analysts in years and now they're bringing them in.

00:46:00 We've had other agencies, as well, that want to come in. We've got the Bureau of Indian Affairs that's represented down there, as well. They work in our southwest border as they deal with our tribal concerns all along the southwest border, which we have many, as well. So, there's a lot of interests from a lot of agencies that perhaps weren't touching EPIC in the past, and today are there, or at least want to bring in more personnel. And as soon as we can get that building expanded, or we can get more seats, we'll surely bring them in, as well. We'll welcome them back.

00:46:31 Male Speaker: Are there any foreign equivalence of EPIC that you look to for best practice, maybe among the Europeans, for example?

Larry Villalobos: That we would look for best practices from a foreign? Yeah, there is, actually. There's several fusion centers, if you will, that have sprung up. There's – I forget the name of the one in – I forget that one.

00:47:06 [SEKI]. Yeah, the SEKI. They actually designed their intelligence center on some of the things and some of the components that EPIC is doing, with the different agencies and different programs. So, and there's other countries, as well. I mean, Brazil, when they came up specifically was looking at planning for the Olympics. And

then when they saw the facility, they said, hell, we should come up with something like this for Brazil and the greater area of Latin America.

00:47:34 Central America and their current challenges of problems that they have are looking at bodies that they can put together – I say bodies, agencies or task forces – after they visited EPIC. So, there's a lot of foreign counterpart interest in what we do. To them, it's a foreign concept, if you will – no pun intended – that so many agencies in the US federal government could work together under one roof.

00:48:04 In my experience in Mexico, that's pretty incredible when you have agencies in Mexico that are willing to talk to each other. Kind of what we were many, many years ago, before we were forced to be able to talk to each other, as well. But it works. And it's an incredible thing. I mean, when you and tell people that 23 or 24 agencies sit under one roof, in the state, local process, or in the federal process, and they interact and they exchange information, you kind of wonder and say, "Really?" But it is happening.

00:48:36 And we all win from that different agencies that are able to grab some of that information. Our state and local partners that are physically in the building, they're quite amazed. The police department in El Paso, the sheriff's office in El Paso, the state police in El Paso, or the state of Texas, are all there with us because they have such a big part of the southwest border.

00:49:00 And the information that they take away from there and the exchange that we have with them is incredible. And these professionals from those agencies are completely vetted with security clearances just like government employees. So, they exchange and run around in the building with us and provide specific information for us, as well, whenever we need for that portion of the border. So, a very aggressive plan to incorporate some of those entities into the building and try and make it work.

Male Speaker: What role does EPIC play in preventing terrorism?

Larry Villalobos: Good question. You can take the DHS.

Carlos Almengor: I can tell you right now that research and analysis section of the Special Projects Unit is actually working in response to [unintelligible] strategy to sever the ties between the drug proceeds and terrorism. And we, without getting too technical on how we do it, we have identified and placed in the last FY approximately 60 in-depth targeting cables on just that type of information.

00:50:01 So, we play a role in that respect. And there's other entities within EPIC which I really can't speak of in-depth that play key roles in it, as well.

Male Speaker: Let me ask a question from a [audio out] – talk a little bit about de-confliction, how it works and who gets [audio out] agency [audio out].

00:50:37 Larry Villalobos: I'll cover it in broad terms, and you can go specifically into what the Watch is doing. The de-confliction process has probably never been more important than today. There are so many investigations and so many things that are going on all over the world that could cause some issues and some problems not only with our domestic professions here within the United States, but our foreign-based agents that are working with other people.

00:51:04 So, it becomes incredibly important to be able to at the earliest point de-conflict a possibly situation, de-conflict information that's coming in that may be interpreted differently from other areas that are looking at it the same way. So, slowly, EPIC is becoming a de-confliction center, as well. There are plans to incorporate, again, some IT solutions that would help with some of the thing that are going on within the United States, through our [unintelligible] partners and things like that that will assist us.

00:51:36 What started out as a basic de-confliction, if you will, process, of simply of an agent calling the Watch and asking about information about a certain person. And

then EPIC recognizing that there was other agencies or other people throughout the world, or throughout the United States that had the same interest in that particular individual and then work to get those people to talk to each other went their own ways.

00:52:00 I mean, that was as crude as it came. A phone call, and a database check within EPIC, and then a call back to the people out in the field. But today it's a little bit different. It's done digitally, or it's done by computers where the information comes in and immediately we can notify a body of people, or a body of agents or agencies or entities or countries that a specific conflict exists that they want to look at. There's a lot of things that are developing in a lot of the programs.

00:52:30 In the Domestic Highway Enforcement Program, some of the CBP programs to help with the de-confliction. Remember, the border is an incredible confusing area. For those of you who are not familiar with it. There are police agencies and there's international agreements, and there's commerce, and there's my aunt that's got to go cut her hair, and I want to buy tequila or something. So, there's all kinds of things that are going on back and forth on the border that cause chaos not only for the people who live there and the people who have to use the border for whatever commerce exists, but for police and law enforcement professionals that are trying to keep the bad out and still trying to coordinate some of the efforts that are being done in there. But, Carlos, you can address some of the de-confliction things that we're doing in the Watch.

00:53:23 Carlos Almengor: Specifically in the Watch, Larry mentioned a little bit about it, there. If we get somebody that calls in – and it doesn't have to be an officer on the side of the road, it can be any agent or officer doing whatever enforcement action they're doing. If they're running that record check and we have, as we run our databases, we have information that there's other interests throughout the United States, whether it be FBI, whether it be DEA, or whether it be ATF, we have the capability to very quickly let the officer who is on the phone, or let the officer who has sent in an email request to run checks, know that this is the databases that we've

checked, there is active records in these databases and these are the people that you need to be talking to further your case, further your arrest, further your action that you are taking on the side of the road.

00:54:10 We also have other ongoing programs. One of them being Operation No Refuge. A primary and priority-type effort by Commissioner [Merson] from CBP. And that's basically taking away the welcome mat for those that are passing the border legally every day, but have a tie to the drug world in some way, shape or form. So, we run those de-confliction efforts, as well.

00:54:34 Because it's a de-confliction between interdiction and investigation and we want to make sure that we do not cross the line, and do things properly.

Larry Villalobos: I just want to finish up by saying thank you all. I want to make sure that I give a special thanks to a Mr. [Amil Levine], who is somewhere in Vienna out there. He's one of those initial 90-pound head analysts that came to EPIC many, many years ago from the Navy and designed some of the programs that we had here.

00:55:09 And Mr. [Dennis Hager], as well, who contacted me during the preparation of some of the things that we showed you here today to give us some insight on how the center was born, how the information or the mandates came from DEA headquarters and expanded out to everything in there.

But most of all I'd like to thank some of the people that come before us for a longest time along the southwest border - those Customs agents, those Border Patrol agents, those DEA agents from the early days that perhaps some of you are related to, or kids of. They were pretty incredible.

00:55:43 The things that they designed, the things that they invented, with little or no tools to give birth to an intelligence center that's capable of so much is quite incredible.

Thank you, all. Come visit our center.

00:56:00 Host: Carlos and Larry, thank you both very much for giving an excellent presentation. We've come a long way since six desks in a seedy motel, that's for sure.

I want to make a very special plug. It just so happens that there is a group of retired agents and Intel analysts putting together a reunion for folks who have worked at EPIC. It's going to be in March - March 8th, 9th and 10th, in El Paso, Texas. If you are interested in participating in that reunion, contact us here at the DEA Museum and we will put you in touch with the folks who are planning that.

00:56:36 Catie Drew has a small token of appreciation to both of you from the DEA Educational Foundation for taking the time. That's CFC No. 17 007. Again, thank you all very much for joining us, today. Take care.

End of recording.