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Smuggled puppies a concern to California

By Elysa Cross, *Public Affairs Specialist, Office of Public Affairs*

Everyone loves a soft cute puppy – those sweet brown eyes, short stubby legs, little wagging tail are hard to resist. Unfortunately, some people are willing to take advantage of that love and are smuggling very young puppies from Mexico into the United States.

Purebred and designer breed puppies are purchased in Mexico for between \$50 and \$150, then sold at street corners, parking lots and flea markets in Southern California for between \$300 and \$1,000 each, according to the Border Puppy Task Force. The Task Force is a group of 14 California animal welfare and law enforcement agencies including U.S. Customs and Border Protection and initiated by the San Diego Humane Society. The Task Force was formed in 2004 after a rash of complaints from owners who reported their dogs were getting sick and often dying.

The Border Puppy Task Force conducted a two-week statistic gathering operation at the Otay Mesa and San Ysidro ports of entry. The findings were announced at a press conference held on December 20, 2005 at the San Ysidro border crossing. The operation looked at animals brought from Mexico to the United States. During the two-week study 362 puppies under the age of 3 months were brought into the United States from the two points of entry. Over a year's time, that equates to almost 10,000 young puppies entering San Diego County.

Puppies were found packed in glove compartments and truck beds. Some of them don't have teeth, are drenched in vomit, or are barely weaned. "Puppy peddling is better than selling drugs. The consequences are far less," said Simran Zilaro, with San Diego Humane Society.

"Most of these pups are bred in Mexico, pulled from their mothers at four to five weeks of age, sold south of the border and smuggled across into the United States for sale," said Capt. Aaron Reyes of the task force. "Each bust leads us to yet another seller and we're following up on leads as quickly as we can."

It is legal to cross the border with dogs if they are declared to CBP and they have rabies shots and health records.

The American public can put a stop to this practice by following the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' guidelines for people considering buying a puppy, regardless of the source:

- Deal only with reputable breeders who screen

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dogs for heritable diseases and remove aggressive dogs from the breeding lines.

- Make sure there has been no inbreeding.
- Confirm that the breeder does not keep more dogs than can be properly cared for and ensures that the animals have proper veterinary care.
- Make sure the breeder supplies an adoption/purchase contract in plain English that spells out the breeder's responsibilities, the buyer's responsibilities, health guarantee, and a return policy.

Puppy shipments

March 12, 2006

Twenty-four Poodles and two Chihuahua puppies were found stuffed in a duffel bag. When the car the puppies were in was moved into secondary inspection, the driver panicked, opened two duffel bags and began pulling out puppies.

April 12, 2006

Twenty-eight puppies, infested with parasites, dehydrated and too weak to stand, were seized after a CBP officer noticed a paw reach out from under the front seat Tuesday evening at San Diego's Otay Mesa border crossing. The puppies had been placed under the seat and duct tape had been used to seal the seat so that the puppies could not get out.

April 14, 2006

CBP officers discovered seven puppies hidden under the front seat of a car coming from Mexico into San Diego. Officers spotted the cocker spaniel and six poodles Thursday morning and pulled over the driver, a 60-year-old Los Angeles man. Each puppy is worth about \$500. The driver, whose name wasn't released, was fined \$3500 for failing to declare the puppies.

April 19, 2006

A woman met an officer of the Border Puppy Task Force, a coalition of animal law enforcement agencies, at the Los Angeles Monterey Park in a parking lot at Garfield and Newmark avenues where she was arrested for allegedly selling underage puppies from

Mexico.

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