

[Skip Navigation](#)

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

News Releases

September 28, 2009

ICE and international partners seize more than \$41 million in Colombia and Mexico *Largest container bulk cash seizure made in Colombia and the United States*

WASHINGTON - U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) special agents along with Colombian and Mexican law enforcement officers between Sept. 9 and 18 made the largest bulk cash container seizure in Colombia and the United States - more than \$41 million in U.S. currency that was secreted in shipping containers found in ports in Colombia and Mexico. The seizures are part of an ongoing ICE investigation by ICE's Attaché Office in Bogota, Colombia.

"ICE's bilateral cooperation between its foreign law enforcement partners has significantly furthered ICE's mission to disrupt the criminal organizations that are smuggling narcotics into the United States and smuggling bulk cash shipments out, which they use to fund additional criminal activities," said the Department of Homeland Security Assistant Secretary for ICE John Morton. "This seizure of more than \$41 million has surely put a dent in the illegal activities of the individuals involved."

"We recognize both the U.S. government and the Mexican authorities as our best allies in the fight against organized crime and thank and congratulate ICE for their support and collaboration," said General Oscar Naranjo Trujillo, director general of the Colombian National Police. "We also praise the dedicated and professional work of 152,000 Colombian policemen that work day and night towards security and coexistence amongst Colombians and the work of the members of the Customs and Tax Police and the Anti-Narcotics Directorate. We are determined to bring to justice the suspected owners of these illegal funds, as well as other drug traffickers that through their illegal activities damage Colombia and its allied countries."

Alfredo Gutierrez, chief of Mexico's Tax Administration Service, said, "The data we collect electronically from the trade community on a regular basis and the data we receive from and crosscheck with our international partners is now processed through highly sophisticated systems and cutting-edge technologies. Our personnel have been trained to make the best of these instruments and the results are there."

- On Sept. 9, Colombian customs inspectors and Colombian National Police (CNP) officers seized \$11.2 million in U.S. currency hidden in two shipping containers, each containing 20 big bags filled with ammonium sulfate. Sixteen of the 40 bags contained \$700,000 in \$20 dollar bill denominations. The containers departed on a vessel from the port of Manzanillo, Mexico, destined to the west coast port of Buenaventura, Colombia. According to Colombian customs inspectors, this seizure is the most cash ever seized by police at a port in Colombia.
- On Sept. 10, a second seizure of U.S. currency estimated at \$11.2 million was also seized at the port of Buenaventura.
- Additionally on Sept. 11, ICE Attaché Mexico City special agents reported that information developed by ICE Attaché Bogota agents resulted in a third seizure of U.S. currency estimated at \$11 million discovered hidden inside two shipping containers containing sodium sulfate at the Port of Manzanillo, Mexico.
- On Sept. 14, ICE special agents along with Colombian authorities discovered in Buenaventura three additional shipping containers containing approximately \$5 million in \$100 and \$50 dollar bill denominations concealed within bags labeled as sodium sulfate. These shipping containers also originated in Manzanillo.
- On Sept. 18, a second seizure was recovered in the amount of \$2.15 million in \$100 dollar bill denominations concealed within two containers with similar bags containing sodium sulfate aboard a vessel that arrived in Manzanillo.

The ports of Buenaventura and Manzanillo are key points of a well-known route used for smuggling cocaine northward to Mexico and then on to the United States, and for sending cash back into Colombia.

The ICE Attaché Bogota office is the lead U.S. law enforcement agency in this bulk cash smuggling investigation, with assistance from ICE Attaché Mexico City, the Colombian National Police, Colombian Department of Treasury, Mexican Customs, and the Mexican Assistant Attorney General for Special Investigations and Organized Crime (Siedo).

ICE is the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security, charged with enforcing a wide array of laws, including those related to financial crime, trade fraud, narcotics smuggling, cash smuggling, and others. ICE has taken a leading role in combating bulk cash smuggling, teaming in 2005, with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to launch Operation Firewall, a comprehensive law enforcement operation targeting criminal organizations involved in the smuggling of large quantities of U.S. currency. The ICE Office of International Affairs (OIA) is a critical asset in this mission, responsible for enhancing national security by conducting and coordinating international investigations involving transnational criminal organizations and serving as ICE's liaison to counterparts in local government and law enforcement.

Since its inception in 2005, Operation Firewall efforts have resulted in approximately 524 arrests and 3,275 seizures in the United States and abroad totaling over \$260 million. Over \$100 million has been seized by foreign authorities. In Jan 2007, Colombia authorities working in conjunction with ICE and other federal authorities found approximately \$85 million in U.S. currency, euros and gold bars in five stash houses in Cali, Colombia. This is the largest cash seizure in Colombian history.

-- ICE --

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of five integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.

Last Modified: Monday, September 28, 2009