

*The Department of the Treasury
Office of Inspector General*

Report Title

PROTECTING THE PUBLIC: Customs Faces Staffing Challenges Along The Northern Border (OIG-CA-03-002; issued October 31, 2002)

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Synopsis

To review staffing challenges faced by the U.S. Customs Service due to heightened security following the events of September 11th, OIG evaluators visited 30 Northern border ports of entry in January 2002. Using a structured questionnaire, interviews were conducted with Customs inspectors and a limited number of other Federal agencies' employees. We also observed and photographed the conditions at the ports/crossings, while traveling along approximately 3,200 miles of the Northern border.

We found that Customs used several approaches to address staffing challenges along the Northern border. Specifically, Customs temporarily assigned inspectors, activated seasonal and part-time employees, and utilized staff from other Federal and state agencies. Customs officials, however, expressed concern about the length of time it takes to hire and place full-time inspectors. In addition, several unique conditions exist that impact staff assigned to the Northern border such as the remoteness of some ports of entry, limited housing, and extreme winter weather conditions.

We also found that clarification of staffing requirements is needed during the time of heightened alert levels in terms of defining a port of entry, officers' responsibilities while on duty, and physical jurisdictional boundaries. Customs management concurred with the three recommendations and has taken planned corrective actions.

Customs was divested from the Department of the Treasury to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in March 2003 pursuant to the Homeland Security Act of 2002. Accordingly, audit follow-up is the responsibility of DHS management.