

Sahuarita Police Department

Who is in charge: John Harris.

Where he stands: “The only impact I see is on the positive side where the feds have given us extra money to work with Stonegarden.”

How it’s documented: Classifies most referrals and assists to immigration authorities as “assist other agency – federal,” a category that doesn’t include cases where a more serious crime was suspected because the system codes incidents by worst offense.

What the Star reviewed: Spreadsheet printout with three years worth of assist-other-agency-federal calls and reviewed the full records for 40 cases.



John Harris

Overview

Sworn officers: 43

Immigration-related incidents the year after SB 1070 took effect that the agency provided: 54

Share of total incidents: Unknown

Findings

- Because of Sahuarita’s location along a north-south rail corridor, it has special problems with recent border crossers unloading from trains. Harris has negotiated with the railroad to try to end stops in the town, especially stops that block a major intersection.
- Like all department’s in the Star’s analysis, Sahuarita receives Stonegarden funding from the Department of Homeland Security. To fulfill the grant, officers do intensified traffic patrols for traffic violations. “What we do is lots of activity in our major thoroughfare, high visibility, and it pushes people to the periphery where they can actually be identified and located by Border Patrol,” he said.
- Harris sees the cooperation between local police and federal authorities not as a drain, but as a way to better fulfill his mission of providing public safety. In his view, Border Patrol agents regularly stopping at a traffic stop to back up his officers is a net gain — improved security for his officers, better inter-agency relations and a painless exit if immigration issues do come up. More than half of immigration-related calls started with a request from Border Patrol or railroad police.
- Harris emphasized that the department does not do specific patrols for immigration and the information requested during traffic stops is the same regardless of a person’s race. The department does not question the identity of passengers unless there are special circumstances. “It’s up to the discretion of the officer, but if they do ask people, they’d better document why they did that,” he said. “They don’t as a matter of course do that. Being a passenger is not against the law.”