

# **Arrest policy changed on illegal immigrants**

## **County's new procedure may make it harder to elude deportation**

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Sept. 8, 2007

### **Houston Chronicle**

The Harris County Sheriff's Office has stopped issuing "non-arrest" bonds to illegal immigrants, closing what victim advocates called a loophole that allowed some suspects to dodge deportation.

The new policy was implemented on Aug. 22, the same day the Houston Chronicle published a story on Juan Felix Salinas, an illegal immigrant accused of causing a crash that killed three people while he was free on a non-arrest bond.

"We certainly applaud the change," said Andy Kahan, director of the Mayor's Crime Victims Office.

Before the policy took effect, Harris County Jail officials allowed suspects with outstanding warrants for certain relatively minor crimes to pay "non-arrest" bonds without being formally booked, sheriff's Sgt. D.M. Mackey said.

Crime victims advocates complained that allowed illegal immigrants to avoid contact with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents.

Mackey said the decision to change the "non-arrest" bond policy was designed to help ICE better identify illegal immigrants.

Salinas was arrested Aug. 11, accused of driving with a blood-alcohol level three times the legal limit and smashing into a car on Interstate 10, killing a young Houston couple and a 2-year-old boy.

At the time of the accident, Salinas was free on a \$1,500 "non-arrest" bond posted at the Harris County Jail.

Shortly after Salinas' arrest, Matthew Baker, an ICE official in Houston, said the "quick" bonds at the county jail had posed problems for ICE agents.

On Friday, ICE issued a statement praising the change in policy, saying it "will improve the opportunity for ICE to identify removable aliens."

Under the new policy, suspects who are not U.S. citizens still will be able to make bail, but no longer will be eligible for "non-arrest" bonds, Mackey said. County officials will continue to issue those bonds to U.S. citizens, she added.

Harris County and ICE officials recently have stepped up efforts to identify illegal immigrants with criminal records, officials said.

When suspects are booked in the county jail, they routinely are asked about their citizenship, Mackey said.

More than 4,600 county inmates admitted to being illegal immigrants and had their cases referred to ICE from August 2006 through August 2007, according to the sheriff's office records. In the previous 18 months, the office had identified 1,940 illegal immigrants in the jail.

Mackey did not have statistics Friday for the number of "non-arrest" bonds issued. Salinas escaped the attention of ICE officials this spring by posting a "non-arrest" bond, ICE officials said last month. Salinas, a 41-year-old from Nuevo Leon, Mexico, first came to the attention of U.S. Border Patrol agents in 1999, in Rio Grande City. He was removed from the country by immigration officials but found his way back to Texas.

In 2006, he was arrested by Jacinto City police and paid a \$207 cash bond for a public intoxication charge.

In March, he was arrested again and charged with assault for allegedly shaking his wife, court records show. In April, Salinas posted the "non-arrest" bond at the county jail. After the collision last month that killed Tenisha Williams, 26, her husband, S.J. Williams, and her son, 2-year-old Xavier Brown, ICE officials put a hold on Salinas so he would not be released from custody before trial.

He now faces three counts of intoxicated manslaughter, in addition to the earlier assault and public intoxication charges.