

# Immigration Sweep Yields 761 Arrests

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SANTA ANA, Calif. - Federal officials said Tuesday they arrested more than 750 illegal immigrants over the past week in the Los Angeles metropolitan area in what they described as one of the biggest such sweeps in U.S. history.

The weeklong series of raids in the five-county region targeted illegal immigrants who had previously been deported for crimes or had ignored final deportation orders.

The raids netted 338 illegal immigrants who were arrested at their homes and apartments and 423 who were identified in area jails since Jan. 17. Those already jailed will be transferred to federal custody when they finish serving their state sentences, said Virginia Kice, spokeswoman for U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The sweep netted illegal immigrants from 14 countries in all, including Mexico, Honduras, Ukraine, India, Japan, Poland and Trinidad.

Of the 761 people arrested, more than 450 have already been deported, Kice said.

The raids were a major push within Operation Return to Sender, a crackdown that has resulted in 13,000 arrests nationwide since June. Immigration officials have also identified 3,000 inmates in state and local jails who will be deported.

The operation targets those illegal immigrants who go into hiding after skipping their deportation proceedings and criminals who have re-entered the United States after being previously deported for crimes committed in this country.

Officials estimate 600,000 illegal immigrants who have ignored deportation orders are still at large, Kice said.

The Associated Press rode along for the first day of sweeps in Orange County last week. Immigration officers gathered at 4 a.m. in a chilly parking lot for a pep talk, then fanned out to houses in Anaheim and Santa Ana.

At the first stop, an apartment complex, a half-dozen agents arrested a 29-year-old illegal immigrant wanted for a driving-under-the-influence conviction. Kice said that man is now helping them find his brother, a registered sex offender.

At the second stop, the agents were looking for a convicted rapist and immigration fugitive. Instead, they arrested six men who could not provide legal papers — and later learned that all six were illegal and four had criminal records.

The rapist they sought had moved out the week before, Kice said.