

'Made in Mexico' Uniforms Miff Border Cops

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Washington (AP) -- The labels inside the U.S. Border Patrol uniforms have been making many federal agents feel uneasy. It's not the fit or feel of the olive-green shirts and pants, but what their labels read: 'Made in Mexico.'

'It's embarrassing to be protecting the U.S.-Mexico border and be wearing a uniform made in Mexico,' says T.J. Bonner, president of the National Border Patrol Council, a 6,500-member union.

Agents and lawmakers are concerned about the consequences if the uniforms for agents charged with combating illegal immigration fall into the hands of criminals or terrorists.

'If we're manufacturing uniforms in Mexico, what's to stop someone from walking across the border in a Border Patrol uniform?' asked Rep. John Carter, a Republican from Round Rock. 'How do you know who are our guys and who are their guys?'

For more than a year, the shirts and pants worn by agents and inspectors with U.S. Customs and Border Protection have been made in Mexico. The uniforms are supplied by VF Solutions of Nashville, Tenn., which subcontracts its work to plants in the United States, Mexico, Canada and the Dominican Republic.

'The principle of it seems almost like an oxymoron,' said James Stack, the National Border Patrol Council's vice president for the region that includes Texas and New Mexico. 'Most agents don't like it.'

Customs officials say they haven't detected any security breaches or misuse of the uniforms. Strict security measures are in place, including on-site inspections at the Mexican plant. U.S. officials conducted a review in August, a statement from the U.S. Customs and Border Protection released Wednesday said.

'Based on this review, a report will be submitted to the CBP commissioner for determination on the made-in-Mexico issue, and no decisions have been made at this point,' the statement said.

House members are expected to consider new immigration and border security measures after the Thanksgiving congressional break. Carter and Rep. Rick Renzi, R-Ariz. say they plan to press a measure that would require the uniforms be made in the United States. Renzi said he wants Republican House leaders to include the requirement as part of an immigration enforcement measure expected to be introduced in early December.