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# Border emergency declared in New Mexico

## Governor says area 'devastated' by human and drug smuggling

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**(CNN) -- New Mexico Gov. Bill Richardson declared a state of emergency Friday in four counties along the Mexican border that he said have been "devastated" by crimes such as the smuggling of drugs and illegal immigrants.**

The declaration said the region "has been devastated by the ravages and terror of human smuggling, drug smuggling, kidnapping, murder, destruction of property and the death of livestock. ...

"[It] is in an extreme state of disrepair and is inadequately funded or safeguarded to protect the lives and property of New Mexican citizens."

New Mexico shares 180 miles of border with the Mexican state of Chihuahua.

"The situation is out of hand," Richardson said Friday night on CNN, noting that one 54-mile stretch is particularly bad.

The Mexican government issued a statement in which it acknowledged the problems along the border, but said it continues to make consistent efforts to target them along with U.S. authorities.

It said some of Richardson's views stem from "generalizations that do not correspond to the spirit of cooperation and understanding that are required for dealing with problems of common concern along the border."

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Richardson's declaration makes \$750,000 in state emergency funds available to Dona Ana, Luna, Grant and Hidalgo counties.

Richardson pledged an additional \$1 million in assistance for the area, his office said in a news release.

He said on CNN that the funds will be used to hire additional law enforcement personnel and pay officers overtime.

In announcing the state of emergency, Richardson -- a Democrat who served in President Clinton's Cabinet -- criticized the "total inaction and lack of resources from the federal government and Congress" in helping protect his state's residents along the border.

"There's very little response from the Border Patrol," he said on CNN. "They're doing a good job, but they don't have the resources."

The governor announced the move after a helicopter and ground tour of the border near Columbus, New Mexico, the statement said.

He said on CNN that he "saw the trails where these illegal routes take place" as well as fenced areas along the border where the fence is "literally nonexistent."

According to Richardson's statement announcing the declaration, "Recent developments have convinced me this action is necessary -- including violence directed at law enforcement, damage to property and livestock, increased evidence of drug smuggling, and an increase in the number of undocumented immigrants."

He called on Mexico to "bulldoze the abandoned town of Las Chepas, which is directly over the border from Columbus."

The statement went on to say that "Las Chepas is a notorious staging and resting area for those who smuggle drugs and immigrants into the United States."

Some of the pledged funds will be used to create a field office for the New Mexico Office of Homeland Security to focus specifically on the border.

There will also be new efforts to protect livestock in the area near Columbus, "along a favorite path for illegal immigration where a number of livestock have been stolen and killed," the statement said.

Richardson said he wanted residents of the four counties "to know my administration is doing everything it can to protect them."

Alejandro Cano, secretary of industrial development for the Mexican state of Chihuahua -- which borders New Mexico -- pledged to support Richardson's efforts, the statement said.

Richardson told CNN he met with Mexican governors several weeks ago on border security.

"My people on my side asked me to take this step, and I've done so reluctantly," Richardson told CNN. "As governor, I have to protect the people I represent."

He noted he is the nation's only Hispanic governor, and "we're a state that's been very good to legal migrants. ... This action, I believe, had to be taken."

The Mexican Foreign Ministry sent Richardson a letter Friday saying it has requested that Mexican consuls in Albuquerque and El Paso, Texas, meet "as soon as possible" with New Mexico officials "to promote pertinent action by the authorities of both countries in the framework of existing institutional mechanisms."

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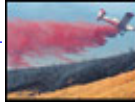


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