

# Maricopa County Sheriff's Office Joe Arpaio, Sheriff



## **ARPAIO LAUNCHES "OPERATION DESERT SKY"**

### **POSSE AND SHERIFF'S DEPUTIES CONVERGE TO REDUCE DRUGS AND ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION THROUGH MARICOPA COUNTY**

#### **30 Posse Pilots/Aircraft Mobilized as Spotters**

(Phoenix, AZ) Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio will announce today that he has recently launched a full scale offensive in the valley including the southwest and southeast desert corridors through which large amounts of illegal drugs and human cargo are smuggled into Maricopa County.

Arpaio's aim: to essentially seal the county border from the growing invasion of drug and human traffickers. Arpaio says he is confident that the operation will result in a number of arrests and seizures but as important, the operation's aim is to act as a deterrent to keep criminals from entering the county.

Dubbed "OPERATION DESERT SKY," the undertaking is similar to Arpaio's crime suppression operations of the past with these exceptions: the duration of the operation will be over several weeks; it will cover a much broader territory; and it will utilize an extensive array of fixed wing aircraft to spot smugglers as they make their way from Mexico into the county at its southern most borders.

"This will be a far longer and broader strategy by this Sheriff's Office to deter illegal immigration as well as the flow of narcotics into Maricopa County," Arpaio says.

Arpaio says the trigger for the operation was the recent arrest of 207 illegal

**aliens by his deputies in human smuggling investigations. Additionally, in the last 12 months, nearly 36,000 pounds of cocaine, methamphetamine and marijuana with a street value of over \$25 Million have been seized.**

**This level of activity is contrary to widely published reports quoting several federal officials who suggest that there is a large reduction in drug and human trafficking at the US-Mexican border.**

**Arpaio, who was the top federal law enforcement official with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration serving in Mexico, Latin America, Texas and Arizona does not fully agree with those statements by federal officials**

**“My office has not experienced any notable reduction in criminal activity of drug, illegal aliens and human smuggling from Mexico into Maricopa County,” Arpaio says.**

**Although the operation is wide in scale, Arpaio promises little to no disruption of normal law enforcement operations during DESERT SKY. Manpower and resources will be furnished largely by the Sheriff’s armed volunteer posse to include 30 fixed wing aircraft and pilots and deputies from the Sheriff’s Office human smuggling and drug enforcement units.**

**The posse aircraft will be used consistently for spotting traffickers who will then communicate to ground crews the location of suspect vehicles**

**Given the level of danger posed by the smugglers, deputies and qualified armed posse volunteers and deputies including the SWAT team will be equipped to respond on the ground with M-16s and other firearms including the Sheriff’s 50 caliber machine gun.**

**Drug sniffing canines will be utilized by Sheriff’s deputies to track down runners, traffickers who routinely flee on foot from law enforcement, often leaving behind their illegal cargo.**

**Any intelligence gathered during the operation will be furnished to federal and state agencies for appropriate action, Arpaio says.**

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**OPERATION DESERT SKY will be the subject of a press briefing by Sheriff Arpaio at Chandler Stellar Airpark located on Chandler Road just west of McClintock: 3:30PM Tuesday, March 29, 2011. Air posse planes and pilots will be assembled there. Contact the on call PIO for entry instructions into the privately owned airpark. END**

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