



Customs and Border Protection's (CBP's) 100-Mile Rule

For more information, please contact Chris Rickerd, (202) 675-2339, crickerd@dcacclu.org

Background

Under 8 U.S.C. § 1357(a)(3), CBP officers have the right to stop and conduct warrantless searches on vessels, trains, aircraft, or other vehicles anywhere within “a reasonable distance from any external boundary of the United States.” Regulations define this “reasonable distance” as 100 air miles from any external boundary of the U.S., including coastal boundaries, unless an agency official sets a shorter distance.¹ They can also enter private property without a warrant (excepting dwellings) within 25 miles of any border.

As a result, two-thirds of the U.S. population, or approximately 200 million people, are potentially subject to so-called investigatory detention and warrantless search by CBP agents. (Nine of the ten largest U.S. cities are within 100 air miles of the boundary, and several states lie entirely within this area including: Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Vermont.)²

These policies originated in a statutory change to the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA) passed in 1946³, and a federal regulation interpreting that change issued in 1953⁴ – in both instances with little deliberation or review.⁵

Consequences of CBP Operations Far Removed from the Border

As a result of 8 U.S.C. § 1357(a)(3), CBP can and does conduct operations far removed from the border and on roads with no immediate border access, where encounters with non-border crossers, including US citizens and permanent residents, are the norm, and notwithstanding ICE's primary responsibility for interior enforcement. These non-border operations by CBP may force residents regularly to encounter

¹ Or “any shorter distance which may be fixed by the chief patrol agent for CBP, or the special agent in charge for ICE,” taking into consideration “topography, confluence of arteries of transportation leading from external boundaries, density of population, possible inconvenience to the traveling public, types of conveyances used, and reliable information as to movements of persons effecting illegal entry into the United States.” 8 C.F.R. § 287.1(b). Due to unusual circumstances, a distance of more than 100 miles may also be declared reasonable by application to the Commissioner of the CBP or the Assistant Secretary of ICE.

² American Civil Liberties Union, “Fact Sheet on U.S. ‘Constitution Free Zone,’” <http://www.aclu.org/technology-and-liberty/fact-sheet-us-constitution-free-zone>

³ See H.R. 386, 79th Congress (1946).

⁴ See CONGRESSIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE NEWS (1953).

⁵ See H.R. REP. NO. 186 (1945); S. REP. NO. 632 (1945).

CBP enforcement while moving about their home county, including on their way to and from work. ***Allowing CBP to divert its attention from the border distracts from its primary mission and results in widespread violations of Americans' rights to property and liberty, including Fourth Amendment and other constitutional violations.*** For example:

-Between 2006 and 2010 in the Rochester, NY, area, approximately 300 immigrants with legal status were arrested by Border Patrol agents, then released. The arrests coincided with an incentive program that rewarded agents with cash bonuses and Home Depot gift cards based on the number of arrests they made.⁶

-According to the ACLU of Arizona, in Tucson, community members report CBP agents entering courthouses and hospitals (including maternity wards) and approaching and interrogating hospital patients, motorists, and pedestrians. A patient at University of Arizona Medical Center was reportedly forced to deliver her child with a CBP agent in the room. CBP agents in Tucson regularly respond to calls to investigate from police, hospital staff, and school officials. These incidents often result from and encourage racial profiling of U.S. citizens and lawful residents.

-In April 2012, residents of the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State filed a class-action lawsuit challenging the Border Patrol's practice of stopping vehicles and interrogating occupants without legal justification.⁷

Federal courts are also skeptical of CBP enforcement in the interior. For example:

-In *United States v. Gabriel*, the District Court in Maine expressed unease with the "constitutional implications of 'pushing the border in' and the fact that Border Patrol was conducting operations well inside the territorial borders of the U.S." 405 F. Supp. 2d 50, 59 (D. Me. 2005).

-In *United States v. Venzor-Castillo*, the Tenth Circuit ruled that a Border Patrol search 235 miles from the border exceeded CBP's authority. 991 F.2d 634 (10th Cir. 1993). "The further one gets from the border," the court stated, "the greater the likelihood the volume of legitimate travelers will increase." *Id.* at 639.

-The Fifth Circuit regards the distance from the border as a "vital element" in evaluating the reasonableness of a Border Patrol stop. *See United States v. Rubio-Hernandez*, 39 F. Supp. 2d 808, 810 (W.D. Tex. 1999). When the stop occurs over fifty miles from the border, this "vital element" is missing.⁸ *See U.S. v. Inocencio*, 40 F.3d 716, 722 & nn. 6-7 (5th Cir. 1994). If the "vital element" rule has not been met, all other factors must be examined 'charily.' *See U.S. v. Pena-Cantu*, 639 F.2d 1228, 1229 (5th Cir. 1981)

⁶ Families for Freedom and New York University School of Law Immigrant Rights Clinic, UNCOVERING USBP: BONUS PROGRAMS FOR UNITED STATES BORDER PATROL AGENTS AND THE ARREST OF LAWFULLY PRESENT INDIVIDUALS (2013).

⁷ *Sanchez et. al. v. U.S. Office of Border Patrol et. al.* 2:12-CV-00735 (Litigated by: ACLU of Washington, Northwest Immigrants' Rights Project and Perkins Coie LLP).

⁸ For example, in *U.S. v. Hernandez-Lopez*, 761 F. Supp. 2d 1171, 1196 (D.N.M. 2010), the court used the 50-mile rule, noting that "Gutierrez stopped the Dodge sedan approximately 92 air miles from the border. This distance is almost twice the guidelines that the Tenth Circuit and Fifth Circuit have established. Additionally, ninety-two air miles is on the threshold of the 100 air mile regulatory limit of the Border Patrol's authority to make warrantless stops. . . . The Court therefore finds weak, if any, support from this consideration."

Conclusion

The “100-Mile Rule” has never been subjected to meaningful debate or scrutiny in Congress. There is nothing in the record to indicate whether the Justice Department’s designation of 100 miles as a “reasonable distance” was anything other than an arbitrary selection.⁹ To prevent CBP from engaging in operations far from the border where border crossers are few and far between, and legitimate travel and commerce are currently often impeded, we urge restricting CBP’s authority to 25 miles from the border and limiting incursions onto private property to 10 miles.

⁹ The Justice Department did not issue regulations defining a “reasonable distance” from the border as 100 miles until 1953. In 1957, these regulations were then published in the *Federal Register*, along with other new regulations for the revised INA. See *Field Officers: Powers and Duties*, 22 Fed. Reg., 236, 9808-09 (Dec. 6, 1957). However, other than their presence in these publications, there is no public history as to why the Justice Department chose 100 miles as the “reasonable distance” from the border under the INA. It may simply be that 100 miles has a history of being the distance considered to be reasonable regarding the availability of witnesses for examination, responses to subpoenas, and numerous other discovery issues under other federal laws. See, e.g., 10 U.S.C. § 849; Fed. R. Crim. P. 7; Fed. R. Civ. P. 45.