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Border emergency declared in New Mexico

Governor says area 'devastated' by human and drug smuggling

(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 says 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."

The move 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.

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.

"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," Richardson said in the statement.

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

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

"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.

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