



Customs and Immigration Union
Syndicat des Douanes et de l'Immigration

ANALYSIS OF CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY'S
PROPOSED CLOSURE/REDUCTIONS OF SERVICE AT
LAND-BORDER, OTHER POINTS-OF-ENTRY
AND POINTS-OF-SERVICE
IN QUEBEC, ONTARIO AND SASKATCHEWAN

ANALYSIS OF OTHER CANADA BORDER SERVICES AGENCY'S
PLANNED SERVICE REDUCTIONS

BRIEF TO THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

NOVEMBER 1ST, 2010

PROPOSED LAND-BORDER POINT-OF-ENTRY CLOSURES AND REDUCTIONS OF HOURS OF OPERATION IN QUEBEC, ONTARIO, AND SASKATCHEWAN

1. Introduction

The Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) has announced that, as part of its 'Strategic Review', in Quebec it intends to close two (2) land-border points-of-entry, reduce hours of operation at three (3) other such points-of-entry, and further close four (4) inland points-of-service in this province. The CBSA further intends to close a land-border point-of-entry in Saskatchewan as well as an inland point-of-entry and five (5) inland points-of-service in Ontario. The express purpose of these actions by CBSA is 'cost cutting' although no specific amount of expected 'savings' has been identified to us thus far. At the time of preparing this brief, CBSA had only indicated that:

"The elimination of some positions is expected to be mostly offset by attrition and the normal movement of employees within the Public Service. "

Among other CBSA proposed Strategic Review initiatives that directly affect operations and thus Canadian security we find the following:

- Reducing local intelligence gathering capacity by centralizing targeting activities
- Ending the Canadian involvement in the International Container Security Initiative – meaning abandoning Canada's only pre-arrival examination capacity
- Abandoning CBSA's role in the Federal Tobacco Control Strategy by re-directing the funds earmarked for assessing the effectiveness of reducing tobacco smuggling
- Ending funding for joint Canada-US flights (joint charters) for individuals determined to be a threat to national security or high risk criminals or uncooperative deportees – re-directing money initially earmarked as part of the Public Safety and Anti-Terrorism (PSAT) initiative

All of these initiatives are important operational matters that directly impact on Canadian public security. CBSA has provided scant detail to explain the rationale for their proposed reductions in activity or the consequences of these changes. As such, we urge the Committee to raise these matters directly with CBSA, the RCMP, and the Minister of Public Safety.

CBSA has also not provided any non-operational alternatives to these direct service reductions to produce the same savings.

The proposed CBSA actions relating to points-of-entry and inland points-of-service will reduce or eliminate service to residents and businesses in the affected areas of Quebec, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. All of the affected points-of-entry in Quebec and the one in Saskatchewan have contiguous US points-of-entry and thus CBSA's actions with respect to these inherently impact US interests as well. Further, what the US will choose to do on their side of the border in relation to these proposed closures and reductions of service may well end up having significant consequences for Canadian security.

As this Brief details, CBSA's proposed direct service reductions have been made unilaterally, without any form of consultation with local municipal officials, stakeholders, or with ourselves, the Union representing the affected employees. Just as concerning, if not more, is the fact that

CBSA has also failed to consult with or even forewarn US authorities of their intentions prior to announcing them.

As an undeniable result, by reducing an already very thin Customs and Immigration law-enforcement presence at the border, these actions, if allowed to occur, will potentially result in an increase of north bound port-runners and of other clandestine entries into Canada thus decreasing Canadian domestic security and increasing costs for other Canadian agencies required to deal with this increased illegal entry.

As mentioned, these proposed closures and service-level reductions will also result in decreased services for local residents and businesses, in many cases changing the historical way of life of the affected residents. Such actions would also come with all of the related negative economic implications involved in areas such as decreased tourism, decreased real-estate value, decreased local commerce, and negative impacts on other local investments. Disheartening is the fact that these potentially devastating local/regional economic consequences coupled with the direct and ancillary job losses would occur with only marginal savings to the CBSA.

Centralizing intelligence *'targeting'* services will also eliminate the essential local knowledge which is recognized as a cornerstone to effective intelligence-led enforcement in this critical enforcement area.

CBSA's proposal to abandon its role in anti-tobacco smuggling through the Federal Tobacco Control Strategy, its proposal to cease having screening Officers posted in other countries as part of the International Container Security Initiative, and its intent to abandon joint Canada/US removals of individuals deemed to be a threat to national security all appear to contradict the Government's focus on international cooperation and coordination and each of these proposed changes raise serious and unanswered questions about the consequences.

This Brief will demonstrate this as well as offer several cost reduction and reallocation alternatives which if applied would maintain service delivery while creating exponentially greater savings.

2. Affected Land-Border Points-of-Entry

Based on CBSA documents, the following are proposed to be closed:

Franklin Centre, QC

- South Western Quebec on New York State border
- Contiguous US Point-of-Entry is Churubusco, New York which is in the midst of expanding through a multi-million dollar project that was already well underway prior to these announcements
- Summer Months open from 8:00am to 12:00pm run by six (6) Front-Line CBSA Officers
- Winter Months open from 8:00am to 4:00pm run by three (3) Front-Line CBSA Officers
- Accordingly CBSA's proposed closure would total cuts of four-and-a-half (4.5) Front-Line Officers on a year round bases

- Maximum potential savings estimate is **500K\$/yr** when estimating using 100K\$/yr per Officer which factors in wages, overtime, pension, benefits, training, tools and uniform; and using 50K\$/yr for maintaining the infrastructure which is a crown-owned building the size of an average bungalow

Jameson's Line, QC

- South Western Quebec on New York State border
- Contiguous US Point-of-Entry is Jameson Line (North Burke)
- Point-of-entry operated year round 8:00am to 4:00pm by three (3) Front-Line CBSA Officers
- CBSA's proposed closure would total cuts of three (3) Front-Line Officers per year
- Maximum potential savings estimate is **350K\$/yr** when estimating using 100K\$/yr per Officer which factors in wages, overtime, pension, benefits, training, tools and uniform; and using 50K\$/yr for maintaining the infrastructure which is a crown-owned building the size of an average bungalow

Big Beaver, SK

- Central Saskatchewan on Montana border
- Contiguous US Point-of-Entry is Whitetail, MT which too is in the midst of expanding through a multi-million dollar project that was already well underway prior to these announcements
- Point-of-entry operated year round nine (9) hours per day except from June 1 to September 15 when it operates at 13 hours per day; currently run by two (2) Front-Line CBSA Officers though the office should already be doubled-up
- Accordingly CBSA's proposed closure would total cuts equivalent to three (3) to three-and-a-half (3.5) Front-Line Officers per year
- Maximum potential savings estimate is **450K\$/yr** when estimating using 100K\$/yr per Officer which factors in wages, overtime, pension, benefits, training, tools and uniform; the extra hours of operation which occur three-and-a-half months of the year; and using 50K\$/yr for maintaining the infrastructure which is a crown-owned building the size of an average bungalow

Based on CBSA documents the following Land-Border Points-of-Entry are proposed for reduced hours of operation:

Morses Lines, QC

- Central Quebec on Vermont border (Hwy 235)
- Contiguous US Point-of-Entry is Morse's Line, VT
- Point-of-entry operated year round 8:00am to 12:00am by six (6) Front-Line CBSA Officers
- Proposed reduced hours are 8:00am to 4:00pm run by three (3) Officers
- CBSA's proposed reduced service would total cuts of three (3) Front-Line Officers
- Maximum potential savings estimate is **300K\$/yr** when estimating using 100K\$/yr per Officer which factors in wages, overtime, pension, benefits, training, tools and uniform;

crossing would remain open so no savings in infrastructure are factored into the estimated savings

East Pinnacle, QC

- Central Quebec on Vermont border
- Contiguous US Point-of-Entry is Pinnacle (Richford), VT which is open 24 hours
- Point-of-entry operated year round 8:00am to 12:00am by six (6) Front-Line CBSA Officers
- Proposed reduced hours are 8:00am to 4:00pm run by three (3) Officers
- CBSA's proposed reduced service would total cuts of three (3) Front-Line Officers
- Maximum potential savings estimate is **300K\$/yr** when estimating using 100K\$/yr per Officer which factors in wages, overtime, pension, benefits, training, tools and uniform; crossing would remain open so no savings in infrastructure are factored into the estimated savings

Glen Sutton, QC

- Central Quebec on Vermont border
- Contiguous US Point-of-Entry is East Richford, VT which has 24 hour service
- Point-of-entry operated year round 24hrs/day by nine (9) Front-Line CBSA Officers
- Proposed reduced hours are 8:00am to 4:00pm run by three (3) Officers
- CBSA's proposed reduced service would total cuts of six (6) Front-Line Officers
- Maximum potential savings estimate is **600K\$/yr** when estimating using 100K\$/yr per Officer which factors in wages, overtime, pension, benefits, training, tools and uniform; crossing would remain open so no savings in infrastructure are factored into the estimated savings

Based on CBSA documents and gathered information, the following Inland Customs Offices are proposed to be closed:

Drummondville, QC

- Commercial inland, North-Central Quebec
- Point-of-Service operated year round 8:30am to 4:30pm five (5) days a week run by one (1) Front-Line CBSA Officer though office should be doubled-up
- Accordingly CBSA's proposed cut would total two (2) Front-Line Officers
- Maximum potential savings estimate is **230K\$/yr** when estimating using 100K\$/yr per Officer which factors in wages, overtime, pension, benefits, training, tools and uniform; a 30K\$/yr estimate is being used for infrastructure estimates given the CBSA's affected office is as a tenant and relatively very small

Granby, QC

- Commercial inland, North-Central Quebec
- Point-of-Service operated year round 8:30am to 4:30pm five (5) days a week run by one (1) Front-Line CBSA Officer and one administrative clerk though office should be doubled-up thus eliminating the requirement for a clerk

- Accordingly CBSA's proposed cut would total two (2) Front-Line Officers
- Office currently provides clearance service for aircraft landing at Bromont Airport
- Maximum potential savings estimate is **230K\$/yr** when estimating using 100K\$/yr per Officer which factors in wages, overtime, pension, benefits, training, tools and uniform; a 30K\$/yr estimate is being used for infrastructure estimates given the CBSA's affected office is as a tenant and relatively very small

Based on CBSA documents and gathered information the following Inland Point-of-Entry is proposed for reduced hours or closing:

Kenora, ON

- Inland, North-West Ontario
- Marine and air point-of-entry operated year round 8:00am to 4:00pm half the year and operated 12hr/days from 8:00am to 8:00pm May through October; currently operated by one (1) Front-Line CBSA Officer with relief from other offices though the port should be doubled-up
- Accordingly CBSA's proposed cut would total three (3) Front-Line Officers
- Office provides clearance service for Kenora Airport and Kenora City Dock
- CBSA has indicated its final intentions for Kenora are *'yet to be determined'*
- Maximum potential savings estimate is **380K\$/yr** when estimating using 100K\$/yr per Officer which factors in wages, overtime, pension, benefits, training, tools and uniform; the four (4) extra hours of operation which occur half the year; a 30K\$/yr estimate is being used for infrastructure savings estimates given the CBSA's affected office is as a tenant and relatively small

Other Affected CBSA Offices

The CBSA has also announced its intention to close seven (7) other inland customs commercial processing offices thus forcing the transfer of the affected commercial volumes to other CBSA points-of-service:

- Brampton, ON (Greater Toronto Area (GTA) – proposed transfer to Pearson)
- Fort Erie, ON Trade Compliance Office (Greater Toronto Area (GTA) – proposed transfer to Fort Erie Peace Bridge)
- Kingston, ON (transfer to be determined)
- Peterborough, ON (transfer to be determined)
- Ottawa, ON Long-room (proposed transfer to Ottawa International Airport Cargo Office)
- Côte-de-Liesse, QC (proposed transfer to Trudeau International Airport Cargo Office)
- Port-Cartier, QC (transfer to be determined)

Important to note is the fact that such a move would, in many cases, remove an already extremely thin Customs & Immigration law enforcement presence in certain (often rural) parts of the country thus reducing the Agency's ability to effectively examine commercial and peripheral interests such as landing CanPass Air flights.

The potential cost savings in these cases are very difficult to establish given many of the transfer details remain 'yet to be determined' by the CBSA.

3. Point-of-Entry/Point-of-Service Costing Issues

- Of the information we do have on hand, the total maximum potential 'savings' for these service reductions are estimated by CIU based on the foregoing analysis to be approximately **3.34M\$**
- The bulk of these savings are likely to come from the possibility of savings through such things as reduced overtime, reduced hiring, and the passing off of costs to other Agencies or Departments
- Theoretically, removing 30 Officers and one (1) clerical position should generate an approximate payroll savings of 3M\$ based on a total compensation analysis. However even this figure is suspect given CBSA's own communications suggest that Officers displaced would be moved to fill vacant positions where needed which indeed could reduce some overtime costs and/or new hiring. The savings would be offset by workforce adjustment contractual obligations which include re-training, moving, and other relocation expenses
- It is also to note that the Big Beaver, SK Land-Border Point-of-Entry was set to break ground on April 1, 2011 for a new office. Accordingly, all of the expenses associated with planning, surveying, tendering, contracting, etc, would be lost given these have already been spent by CBSA

4. Anticipated Consequences – Security Concerns

(i) Canada-US Border Security Relationship

CBSA's unilateral intension to close points-of-entry and to reduce its presence at other such locations is in complete contrast with the long standing Canada-US collaborative border security approach which, until now, had been particularly highlighted since 2006. The approach used also seems to undermine the joint border security approach reflected in joint initiatives such as the Shiprider Agreement, as well as particularly undermine the joint border security study just recently announced by the Public Safety Minister (in June of 2010).

Understandably, US Officials have reacted to this unilateral CBSA action in blunt terms including suggesting that it violates the 2002 US-Canada Smart Border Accord.

"The failure of the Canadian government to coordinate with the U.S. government is absolutely mind boggling...You can't run a border that way. It's unacceptable. We hope our Canadian friends will rethink this decision."

*Plattsburgh-North Country Chamber of Commerce President Garry Douglas
August 22, 2010 Press-Republican*

"Obviously, we hope Canada will reconsider that decision."

*U.S. Rep. Bill Owens (D-Plattsburgh)
August 22, 2010 Press-Republican*

To date, we are unaware of any reconsideration of these decisions by CBSA.

CBSA's proposal to withdraw from the International Container Security Initiative is a disturbing abandonment of the accepted joint strategy of 'pushing' our borders out to proactively identify items of risk before they arrive in North America. We urge the Committee to determine whether this decision was made in consultation with our US security partners and what consequences may flow from it.

Similarly, we urge the Committee to explore the rationale and consequences for CBSA's decision to end its involvement in the Federal Tobacco Control Strategy anti-smuggling initiative given the RCMP continues to identify tobacco smuggling as a very continuing problem.

The rationale provided by CBSA for ending joint charter flights with the US for the removal of deportees deemed to be a threat to national security is unspecified '*policy and legislation changes*'. We urge the Committee to determine precisely what these claimed changes were and whether this CBSA action is required or advisable.

(ii) Increased Potential for Port-Running and Other Clandestine Entries

The CBSA literally intends to remove already existing land-border points-of-entry from roads which have been and appear as though they will continue to be cross-border routes albeit in a one way direction. This clearly promotes the potential for increased port-running and other clandestine entries which, due to a sustained US presence, presumably will result in notification of that fact to Canadian authorities. Removing its already very thin Customs and Immigration presence at the border in the context of a continued refusal by CBSA to participate in mobile interdiction between land-border points-of-entry means that these threats will either be ignored or passed on to the RCMP, accordingly increasing their costs.

It is not at all unreasonable to expect that decreasing an already extremely thin Customs and Immigration law enforcement presence and reducing border screening is likely to result in an increase of guns, drugs and people smuggling into Canada, all of which have profoundly harmful domestic safety and national security consequences. This will become particularly true for residents of Quebec where the majority of affected crossings are located.

It is also extremely important to note that the RCMP's recent Canada-US Integrated Border Enforcement Team (IBET) Threat Assessment (2009) on border security issues reportedly identified an alarming increase in northbound illegal smuggling activities between land-border points-of-entry since 2007. The Report specifically identifies a dramatic increase in northbound people smuggling into Canada which, for the first time since 2007, is greater than such activities running south-bound into the United States (see appendix 'A').

Further, this report identifies Quebec as the location where this problem is especially acute with the primary reason being the vulnerability inherent in the already very high number of unguarded roads into the Province.

Incredibly, CBSA's proposal will actually *increase* the number of unguarded roads which strongly suggests that the RCMP were also not consulted as they should have been prior to these decisions being announced.

Further, these actions directly contradict the Government's recent commitment to combat human smuggling as demonstrated in its proposed legislative changes through Bill C-49 which was very recently introduced in Parliament.

Finally, it should be emphasized that increasing the number of unguarded roads exacerbates the security vulnerability of Canada because CBSA continues to resist participation in the joint-force intelligence-led Border Patrol pilot project between land-border points-of-Entry. Quite literally, these proposals are set to make an already very bad situation considerably worse.

(iii) Bromont Airport

The closure of the inland Granby office may have ramifications for clearance of international flights including from the already vulnerable Corporate CanPass Air Program. Unless CBSA is planning on simply eliminating such screening at the Bromont airport, this will necessarily add costs elsewhere.

We urge the Committee to confirm that CBSA's plans with respect to closing the Granby office will *not* result in a reduction or elimination of international travelers being examined at this airport under existing programs. Such a consequence would be an enormous and unacceptable security deficiency.

If no alternate Corporate CanPass Air Program examination capacities are being contemplated, the only other option would be to eliminate Bromont as an airport qualified to receive international flights which would have negative economic implications locally/regionally.

(iv) Centralization of the Agency's Intelligence Targeting Capacity

CBSA has announced its intention to centralize the Agency's intelligence targeting positions. While the goal is to create a greater concentration of personnel, it will deprive the Agency, and the Canadian public it serves, of the undeniable operational advantage obtained from a local presence that benefits from localized knowledge and contacts. This combination of local knowledge with systemic and inter-agency real time information/intelligence access is made possible with modern communications yet in the name of 'Strategic Review', CBSA will literally blind its front line intelligence driven operations throughout the country.

Local targeting units know the importers and transporters who operate in their respective regions which provides them with an invaluable edge when it comes to identifying anomalies. Centralizing this function will eliminate this advantage in spite of the fact that local targeting units have a better track record than their centralized counterparts. Further, the communications and relationship between Front-Line CBSA Officers and local Targeters are critical and often include an onsite presence where required and often throughout the course of an inspection. This too would be eliminated with a centralized approach as will what is the repository of local knowledge that has been built-up in the regions throughout the decades.

CIU has raised these issues with CBSA in July 2010 without response.

5. Cost Saving Alternatives

The degradation in service and security being proposed by CBSA is justified exclusively on grounds of cost savings. Accordingly, it is appropriate to consider whether other cost savings alternatives are available which do not create the negative service-delivery consequences the current proposals entail. Several such cost savings alternatives do exist and should be considered.

(i) Firearms Training and Recertification

CBSA's practices and incurring of costs in the arming and recertification process has repeatedly been the subject of concern and identified as being needlessly expensive and counter-productive to effective side-arm training. The heart of this predicament is CBSA's (RCMP inspired) insistence on certifying its Officers at 25 meters despite countless expert recommendations to the contrary. That any of us are aware of, no other police force in North America uses such a standard. Because of the very limited number of 25 meter shooting ranges available and because of its seemingly systemic RCMP dependence, CBSA had only been able to identify and make arrangements with two (2) RCMP shooting ranges, one in Chilliwack, BC and the other in Ottawa, ON (a third range in PEI has recently added itself). CBSA insists that all required training, practice, and recertification only take place at those sites.

Expert firearms instructor opinion has been obtained which confirms that the current practices are unnecessary with the result of significant unjustified expenditure being occurred. People are literally being flown into Ottawa from places like Manitoba for a 2 hour practice session incurring needless and outrageously expensive travel, accommodation and back-fill overtime salary costs. The concerns relating to this flagrant waste of scarce funds have been repeatedly identified to Agency officials but have thus far been ignored.

Estimated potential savings is very difficult to establish but is believed to be at minimum **2M\$/yr** and can only grow as more Officers continue to be armed.

(ii) Deployment of Superintendents

In response to the arming and ending work-alone initiatives, CBSA, using questionable logic to begin with, felt it needed to spend large portions of the funds dedicated to these initiatives towards increasing the number of first level management personnel assigned to field operations. With the implementation of these two (2) initiatives now well on their way and unfolding without having seen an increase in incidents or duties that would in any way support or justify these increased levels of supervision, cost savings are accordingly more than possible.

Also relevant and noteworthy is the fact that Front-Line Supervisors do not like to and consequently hardly ever work midnight shifts preferring to collect '*stand-by*' pay for such shifts. This, in and of itself, confirms that the increase in the number of Front-Line Supervisors was indeed unjustified. Reassignment and cost savings are accordingly more than possible. This situation exists nationally and particularly within the Province of Quebec.

Estimated potential savings (Quebec alone): **1M\$/yr.**

(iii) Management Bonuses

These issues were raised in the 2006 Northgate Report on Border Security issues but were never resolved. Personal bonuses paid to senior CBSA managers were reported to be based on reduced staffing and achieving artificial '*numerical*' rather than '*intelligence-based*' search targets set out in the CBSA Border Management Plan (BMP) of which the Auditor General has also raised fundamental questions. Former CBSA President, Alain Jolicoeur, confirmed the existence of manager bonuses but denied them being tied to the BMP although he never provided the requested follow-up details to the Senate Committee on National Security and Defence. In our view this issue requires and deserves a focused analysis.

Estimated potential savings: Unknown to CIU.

(iv) Joint Facilities

Because of the unique terrain on the Canada-US border in Quebec and in other parts of the country, there is an increased potential for the use of joint facilities with the US. This approach has proven to be operationally effective as well as cost effective at many locations of all sizes including larger locations such as the Coutts/Sweetgrass Land-Border Point-of-Entry on the Alberta/Montana border. Given the announced continuing operation of the US facilities contiguous to the land-border points-of-entry being proposed for closing or reduced hours, such joint Canada-US facilities become especially relevant and would permit cost savings to assist in maintaining the current levels of service.

Estimated potential savings: Unknown to CIU - requires analysis and discussions with US.

(v) Unspecified Contract Expenses Incurred by CBSA

A review of the '*Management Consulting*', '*Unspecified*', '*Information Technology Consulting*', '*Other Business and Professional Services*' and '*Welfare*' contracts issued by CBSA for just the last fiscal year show spending of **over 30M\$**.

Similar CBSA contract spending in these vague areas for the first quarter of Fiscal Year 2010-11 is approximately **12M\$**. Clearly, it is worth analyzing what was specifically achieved and whether such funds might not be better spent on activities that directly benefit the public such as maintaining the operation of the aforementioned points-of-entry, points-of-service, and other identified services.

Interestingly, CBSA has itself identified cutting back on IT consulting contracts as a method of saving funds. A more comprehensive review of the Agency's outside contracting practices would appear to be in order.

Estimated Potential Savings: Unknown to CIU.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

By reducing its already very thin Customs and Immigration enforcement presence in certain parts of rural Canada, the announced point-of-entry and point-of-service closures and reduction of hours by CBSA are, in our view, unjustified, unwise, and contrary to local, regional, and national interests. The same is true for the Agency's intent to abandon its role in the International Container Security Initiative, the Federal Tobacco Strategy, and in the Canada/US joint removals agreement which flows from anti-terrorism initiatives. The absence of consultation with US officials and domestic law enforcement agencies by CBSA compounds the situation and potentially negatively impacts those Agencies' abilities to effectively carry out their respective mandates.

The decisions are contrary to the cross border Canada-US security strategy of the Government and contradict the Government's clear intentions in combating such things as people smuggling which is confirmed as growing by empirical reporting from the RCMP.

The decisions create significant yet needless negative security operational consequences and would produce marginal cost savings.

Alternative costs savings are available to CBSA which can be achieved without any form of negative operational consequences.

It is therefore recommended that the Committee request the attendance of CBSA senior management and RCMP IBET leadership to review the issues identified; and that the Committee recommend that the Government insist that CBSA respond to the operational issues and the alternative cost saving measures identified in this Brief, and such others as the Committee may deem appropriate.

Respectively submitted to the committee for consideration

APPENDIX 'A'

Continental Human Smuggling Tilted Toward Canada

Fri Sep 17, 2010 9:35 PM

By Jim Bronskill, The Canadian Press

OTTAWA - More people were caught trying to sneak into Canada at remote border points with the United States in 2008 than the other way around, a newly released intelligence report reveals.

It was the second straight year that continental human smuggling and other surreptitious crossings tilted in Canada's direction.

The RCMP attributes the trend to factors including a U.S. crackdown on undocumented workers, more American agents along the border and the shaky state of the U.S. economy.

The figures, the latest available, show 952 people were caught entering Canada between legitimate border crossings, while 819 were U.S.-bound.

The numbers appear in the 2009 Integrated Border Enforcement Team threat assessment report, obtained by The Canadian Press under the Access to Information Act.

The 15 binational teams strung along the border include members of the RCMP, the Canada Border Services Agency, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Service, the U.S. Coast Guard and other American agencies.

They work at strategic points between border crossings to thwart smugglers of everything from people and drugs to currency and firearms.

Human smuggling groups identified by the teams have international contacts and focused in 2008 on the B.C.-Washington state border as well as the Quebec-New York-Vermont corridor, the report says.

"They charge excessive fees for directions and send many uninformed migrants on their way to the U.S. and to Canada to claim refugee status."

The report, which says many of the people coming northward are from the Americas, does not indicate how many were legitimate refugees fleeing persecution. However, it adds: "The unknown intention of individuals seeking illegal entry into either country is a concern."

The report calls for a public awareness campaign on the Internet to advise potential border crossers of hazards including extreme weather, dangerous rapids and whirlpools, and even wildlife.

"We have seen cases where people have been injured," said RCMP Supt. Warren Coons, director of the border teams.

"Other people have tried to swim across very dangerous waters in order to get into the country. And others have been caught in snowbanks and, if not for being rescued by emergency services, would have died of exposure."

Though the government and the RCMP have flagged human trafficking — the movement of people for exploitation in the sex trade and other fields — as a concern lately, the teams uncovered no such cases between Canada and the U.S. last year. They've also seen no hint of extremist groups trying to slip across the border undetected, Coons said.

"There hasn't been any indication in the time that I've been in the IBET program that would suggest that terrorist groups are using between-the-ports methods to cross the border," he said in an interview.

Coons noted that terrorism cases in both countries in recent years have tended to involve homegrown radicals rather than violent plotters arriving from abroad.

"But we're definitely vigilant because we recognize that those networks that move contraband or individuals across the border aren't necessarily concerned about national security issues the same way we might be," Coons said.

"So we have to do everything that we can to ensure that they won't be exploited by terrorist groups. National security is our No. 1 priority, make no mistake about that."

The report says cross-border smugglers are becoming "more sophisticated and discriminating" in their adoption of technology, using BlackBerry messaging, scanners, geopositioning devices and satellite phones to their advantage.

The assessment recommends bolstering the border teams with more investigative personnel and analytical support, such as mapping and geospatial specialists. The report also says uniformed officers should be added to the teams to work alongside the plainclothes Mounties who currently toil there. Now, the team members aren't necessarily connected to nearby border communities, said Coons.

"They're not in the coffee shops, they're not visible to the communities along the borders," he said.

"From a safety standpoint for both our members and the community, we see a uniformed presence as being an important element to border security."