

Transcript: “Podcast: The DEA’s El Paso Intelligence Center,” February 2017

Welcome to the latest podcast from the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General. My name is Stephanie Logan.

I’m here with Michael Pannone from our Evaluation and Inspections Division to discuss the findings of a new report on the El Paso Intelligence Center, also known as EPIC.

As its name implies, EPIC is a multi-agency intelligence center in West Texas that analyzes and disseminates intelligence information to law enforcement. Its primary focus is on intelligence concerning Mexico and the Southwest border. Although the Center is led by the DEA, it is not limited to just drug-related intelligence. Rather, it has adopted what it calls an “all threats” focus that includes weapons trafficking, terrorism, human smuggling, and a host of other issues in addition to illegal drugs. Consistent with that broad goal, EPIC’s funding and staff come from over 25 partner agencies, including the DEA.

Michael is a co-team leader for this review. Can you tell us what the review team found, and also explain a couple of the findings in more detail?

Sure, thanks, Stephanie. We found that, overall, EPIC provides valuable information to law enforcement personnel, but there are deficiencies in its governance, strategic management, and operations that could limit its overall effectiveness.

One finding I would highlight relates to those partner agencies you mentioned. These partners are critical to EPIC’s success, yet we found that they are not effectively engaged in governing the Center, and they have reduced the number of personnel they assign there. Specifically, we found that since early 2014, EPIC’s governing bodies have met infrequently, and they have allowed EPIC to operate without an approved, up-to-date strategic plan or effective performance metrics.

This latter point is particularly important. Because EPIC did not have a current strategic plan and effective performance metrics, the partner agencies were unable to determine what value EPIC provides to their agencies. We believe that this led these partners to reduce the number of staff they assigned to the Center by 24 percent since October 2012. A steep drop off like this is a significant problem for any organization, but particularly for one that depends on receiving trained and experienced personnel from its partners to accomplish its mission.

One group that has experienced a particularly steep drop off in recent years is the Intelligence Analysts at EPIC. Since September 2013, the number of analysts at EPIC has dropped by 45 percent. Moreover, we found that many of the Intelligence Analysts who remain at EPIC lack the necessary experience and training to develop complex strategic intelligence products, and they spend much of their time responding to requests for information about specific investigations.

Today's report also describes our other findings, such as EPIC's need to improve its outreach to the law enforcement community, and a potential opportunity for the DEA to better coordinate EPIC's operations with a similar program in its Houston Field Division.

Thanks, Michael.

Oh, it's a pleasure.

To read our report and see the four recommendations we made to the DEA and EPIC management, please visit our website, oig.justice.gov.

Thanks for joining us.

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