



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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DOJ OIG Releases Management Alert Identifying Concerns with the DEA's Transportation Interdiction Activities

Department of Justice (DOJ) Inspector General Michael E. Horowitz announced today the release of a [Management Advisory Memorandum](#) to the Deputy Attorney General and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Administrator regarding concerns identified in the DEA's transportation interdiction activities. These activities include conducting consensual encounters, during which DEA Task Force Groups approach individuals at mass transportation facilities such as airports; ask for consent to speak with the individual; and, if the Special Agents or Task Force Officers think it warranted, ask for consent to search the individual's belongings.

The DOJ Office of the Inspector General (OIG) found, based on its recent evaluation work and a separate, ongoing investigative matter that, during the DEA's transportation interdiction activities, the DEA was not complying with its own policy on consensual encounters conducted at mass transportation facilities. This resulted in DEA and DEA Task Force Group personnel creating potentially significant operational and legal risks. Specifically:

- **Required Documentation Has Not Been Completed for Each Consensual Encounter.** The DEA was not complying with DEA policy to document each consensual encounter, despite prior DEA representations to the OIG, in connection with resolution of recommendations in a [2015 OIG report](#) that the DEA was doing so. Documenting these encounters is important because, among other reasons, it can help the DEA assess whether its consensual encounter activities are an efficient and effective use of law enforcement resources and whether there is evidence of racial profiling in its use of these activities.
- **Required Training for DEA and Task Force Group Personnel Has Been Suspended Since 2023.** In 2023, the DEA suspended the transportation interdiction training required by DEA policy and has not restarted it. As a result, the DEA was not ensuring that all DEA Task Force Group personnel conducting transportation interdiction activities completed that required training, despite the DEA's prior representations to the OIG, in connection with resolution of a recommendation in a [2015 OIG report](#), that the DEA would do so, creating significant risk that DEA Task Force Group personnel will conduct transportation interdiction activities improperly.

The management alert released today also describes an incident earlier this year involving a traveler who was approached for a consensual encounter by a DEA Task Force Officer while boarding a flight. During this incident, after the traveler declined to provide consent, the DEA Task Force Officer detained the traveler's carry-on bag; subsequently, a law enforcement drug-detection dog, according to the DEA, alerted to the bag. The passenger eventually signed a consent form. No cash, drugs, or other contraband was found. By that time, the traveler had missed the original flight. The traveler made a video recording of this encounter on a

personal recording device, and an edited version of the video and audio has been made public. None of the members of the DEA Task Force Group were wearing a body-worn camera, which is not required by any DEA or Department policy.

The OIG further learned that the DEA Task Force Group selected this traveler for the encounter based on information provided by a DEA confidential source, who was an employee of a commercial airline, about travelers who had purchased tickets within 48 hours of the travel. The OIG learned that the DEA had been paying this employee a percentage of forfeited cash seized by the DEA office from passengers at the local airport when the seizure resulted from information the employee had provided to the DEA. The employee had received tens of thousands of dollars from the DEA over the past several years.

Based on its recent evaluation and investigation efforts, and based on its prior oversight work, the OIG concluded that, by proceeding with such interdiction activities in the absence of critical controls, such as adequate policies, guidance, training, and data collection, the DEA is creating substantial risks that DEA Special Agents and Task Force Officers will conduct these activities improperly; impose unwarranted burdens on, and violate the legal rights of, innocent travelers; imperil the Department's asset forfeiture and seizure activities; and waste law enforcement resources on ineffective interdiction actions.

The DOJ OIG made five recommendations to the Office of the Deputy Attorney General and four recommendations to the DEA to address the concerns we identified. The Office of the Deputy Attorney General and the DEA agreed with all of the recommendations.

On November 12, 2024, after receiving a draft of the management alert released today, the Deputy Attorney General issued a directive to the DEA suspending all consensual encounters at mass transportation facilities unless they are either connected to an ongoing, predicated investigation involving one or more identified targets or criminal networks or approved by the DEA Administrator based on exigent circumstances.

Memorandum: Today's memorandum is available on our [website](#).

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