

Border residents fear retaliation from cartels if they report crimes

by [Anna Giaritelli](#)

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Border residents in New Mexico say they are hesitant to report suspicious immigration activity to local and federal law enforcement because they fear the Mexican cartels moving drugs or people into the U.S. will retaliate against them.

Seven residents who live 30 to 50 miles north of the U.S.-Mexico border told the *Washington Examiner* that picking up the phone to call for help if they have been burglarized or found someone sleeping in their barn can lead to nasty consequences.

Billy Darnell, a cattle rancher in Hidalgo County who has lived in the region more than 70 years, said he calls in every incident but has paid the price for informing Border Patrol and the Hidalgo County Sheriff's Department.

"I turned in 700 pounds [of marijuana] up here ... I called it in [to Border Patrol]. They went and got it. That night, they [smugglers] came back. They ... broke off all the floats off my troughs — chopped 'em up, drained all of it," Darnell said, adding groups of 12 men carry heavy packs filled with marijuana through the region.

[Read more: [Feds make biggest-ever fentanyl bust at the border](#)]

Cammi Moore, a cattle rancher and farmer who lives about 50 miles north of the border in Animas, also worries about whether to report illegal activity.

"You don't know whether to call them [suspected criminals] or not, if they are packing 'cause there is retaliation on some families," she said.

She noted the case of Robert Krentz, a prominent rancher in nearby Cochise County, Ariz., who many believe was [murdered by drug cartel members](#) after he left to check on his cattle in 2010 and never returned.

Department of Homeland Security officials declined to respond to questions about possible retaliation from cartel members. But retaliation isn't a figment of the imagination or a conspiracy theory, according to Kris Massey of Animas.

"My house is maybe 100 yards from my barn. One time, I found a hand-drawn map that I turned over to the sheriff's department that listed every ... water tank from south all the way to my house. And my barn was marked with a big X. And they even labeled it 'Massey barn.' So, they're pretty informed on what they're doing. And this is literally on the highway, so you know what they're doing out here in the pastures, and you find bundles of drugs in your field when you're harvesting — backpack size," Massey said.

Tricia Elbrock, a business owner and resident in Animas, said her family believes spotters for the cartels camp out in the hills overlooking her house and will know if she tries to report suspicious activity. She said her family members have gone up the hill during the day and found semiautomatic rifles, satellite phones, cellphones, and telescopes.

"Most of those peaks you'll find batteries, lot of wire, cellphones," she said. "And what they're doing is they're spotting for the loads."

Elbrock said she doesn't approach anything left on her property because those watching "could pick us off with a rifle."

Joel Edwards was elected in November to the highest position in Hidalgo County as one of its three commissioners. He said claims that ranchers and farmers have been retaliated against by cartels after reporting suspicious activities are "legitimate."

"I mix and mingle with those folks a lot," Edwards said. "That's pretty much a real common feeling out there ... I've heard it quite a bit in the last few weeks. They're just scared."

One female rancher out of Animas who asked to remain anonymous said she only calls Border Patrol for major incidents, even though a secondary dwelling on their expansive property is used by smugglers looking to bed down for a night.

"We found a dead guy eight years ago, and that's the last time we reported anything," the woman said.