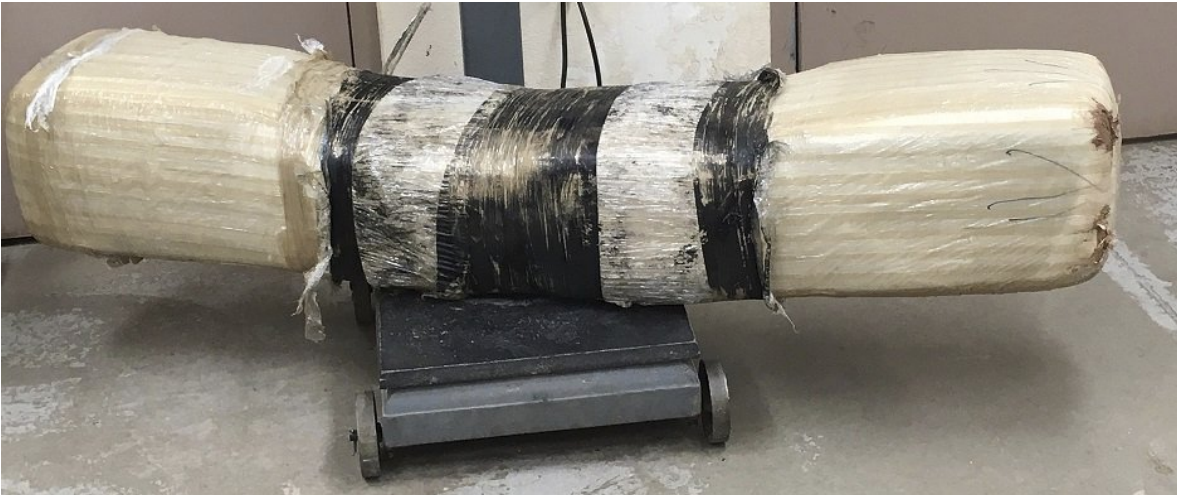


## Giant marijuana bundle launched over US-Mexico border fence

By ASTRID GALVAN

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PHOENIX (AP) — Border Patrol agents in southern Arizona have seized a nearly 100-pound (45 kilogram) bundle of marijuana after spotting it flying over the border fence.

Surveillance video on Wednesday captured the large package launching through the air over the fence from Mexico to the U.S. Agents on the ground found a large, plastic-wrapped bundle worth about \$48,000.

Spokeswoman Stephanie Dixon said drug smugglers are increasingly launching massive bundles of pot over the border fence, posing a danger to nearby residents and businesses because of their weight. She said she knew of one incident in which a bundle went through the roof of a dog house.

It's unclear what smugglers used to launch this particular package, but in the past they've used home-made catapults and air cannons. Dixon said she didn't know the number of such cases over the last few years.

"Not only is it illegal activity but it's extremely dangerous to the public," she said.

The incident occurred one day after President Donald Trump visited the border in Arizona and renewed his call to build a wall to stop the flow of drugs from Mexico.

Many sections of the border already have fencing — in this case between 18 and 23 feet high — that smugglers circumvent by simply flinging their drugs over the top of the barrier. Trump's critics say his wall will do little to stop similar attempts.

Dixon said sending a bundle that heavy over a fence that would require a powerful launcher. She said agents can sometimes hear the packages being launched.

The area where the marijuana landed is near some businesses, but the Border Patrol hasn't reported any damage from Wednesday's incident nor have agents made any arrests.

Dixon said she was unaware of an investigation by Mexican authorities into where the bundle may have come from on the Mexico side.

Last year, Mexican police in Agua Prieta, Mexico, which sits on the border with Douglas, found a stolen van that had been outfitted with a 10-foot (3-meter) air cannon to shoot projectiles into the United States.

Images provided by Mexican authorities showed the black van with a hole cut in its roof and a cannon in the back that could fire projectiles. Authorities also said they found an air compressor apparently used to launch packages.

The Border Patrol has said in the past that the most common form of throwing bundles over the border fence involves softball-sized marijuana packages that sometimes land in residential backyards. Smugglers pay people on the U.S. to retrieve the packages, which are then sent around the country.

High-pressure air cannons can launch much heavier packages. Smugglers have also used trebuchets, a catapult-type launch that can be made out of wood.

Despite smugglers' creative methods to cross drugs into the U.S., marijuana seizures have dropped significantly in the Southwest over the last several years.

Agents seized 2.5 million pounds (1.1 million kilograms) at the Southwest border in 2011. By last year, that number had dropped to 1.3 million pounds (590,000 kilograms).

The Tucson Sector, which covers most of Arizona, also saw a steep drop in pot seizures, from 1 million pounds (454,000 kilograms) in 2011 to 728,000 pounds (330,215 kilograms) last year.

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This story has been corrected to show the measure is kilograms in first sentence.