

## South Florida Seaports Internal Conspiracy Project

### 1. Abstract:

South Florida has long been recognized as a major entry point for narcotics, specifically cocaine and marijuana arriving from South and Central America and the Caribbean basin. Large quantities of cocaine and marijuana have been seized at the port of Miami in containerized cargo. Because of their ability to have access to the vessels, the container yards, and the handling equipment, the dockworkers at the port of Miami control, move and often times are the receivers of the narcotics. Despite recurring incidences of detection by Customs, the number of detections and quantities continued to rise. The concealment methods, if any were even employed, often consisted simply of placing several hundreds of pounds of narcotics in otherwise empty containers, at the rear of containers with legitimate cargo, or simply buried in the first few rows of legitimate cargo. The dockworkers simply opened the containers, removed the narcotics while Customs officers were elsewhere, and closed the doors, often resealing the containers with duplicate seals.

The project utilized the Strategic Problem Solving (SPS) methodology to identify alternative enforcement methods to disrupt this type of smuggling in Miami, force the smugglers to utilize other more easily targeted and costly methods, and to displace the smuggling to other ports within the United States where the dock worker infrastructure was not so thoroughly entrenched.

## 2. Description

### A. Scanning

1. What was the nature of the problem? Repeated incidences of narcotic smuggling through the Miami Seaport by people working at the port. The number of incidences and the volumes(weights) of narcotics seized continued to increase year after year.

2. How was the problem identified? Over a period of several years, Customs at the port of Miami recognized that more and more of their narcotics seizures were in empty containers being returned to the states as the vehicle for concealing the narcotics. Detection was simply a matter of opening the doors to the right containers as they arrived. Even when the narcotics were within a loaded container, the narcotics were in a position to be readily removed by persons other than the importer.

3. Who identified the problem? Through a review of Miami Seaport Anti-Smuggling Unit(ASU)seizures, a team consisting of inspectors, supervisory inspectors and special agents noticed a pronounced increase in the involvement of port workers in drug trafficking at the port of Miami.

4. Far more problems are identified than can be explored adequately. How and why was this problem selected from among problems? Narcotics smuggling involving port workers accounted for roughly 70% of the total of Seaport ASU seizures for the fiscal years 1994,1995 and the first half of 1996. These "internal conspiracies" of port employees were responsible for 60% of the cocaine and 80% of the marijuana smuggled into the United States through the port of Miami. The high percentages, volume and weights involved pointed to internal conspiracies as the most pressing problem facing customs in Miami.

5. What was the initial level of diagnosis/unit of analysis? Having identified internal conspiracies at the port of Miami as the main problem to concentrate on, the problem solving team decided to further narrow their focus. Members of the International Longshoremen Association (ILA) constituted a majority of those arrested for and suspected of active participation in internal conspiracies. This group of port workers had easy access to the shipping containers and their cargo, container yards, ships and loading areas. The problem solving team decided to focus on ILA relationship to internal conspiracies.

## B. Analysis

1. What methods, data and information sources were used to analyze the problem? The initial seizure review compared the frequency of internal conspiracy and consignee seizures to the overall total for fiscal years 1993-1996. To gain a more complete picture of the situation, comparisons by type of narcotic and by weight were done. Information and statistics were also received from the Office of Investigations(OI) based on interviews of previous offenders and confidential informants, as well as surveillance videos and recordings. Additionally, data was compiled from a computer program which tracked ILA members present during each seizure.
2. History: How often and how long was it a problem? The involvement of members of the ILA in narcotics smuggling had been documented for a number of years. However, the data pointed to a substantial increase of ILA internal conspiracies beginning in 1994. In that year ILA involvement was indicated in 24 of 27 cocaine seizures totalling 30,000 lbs.
3. Who was involved in the problem and what were their respective motivations, gains and losses? Money is the main motivator for the internal conspirator/drug smuggler. For relatively easy work, ranging from the actual removal and delivery of narcotics to merely being a lookout,

the financial reward is substantial. Risk of capture, prosecution and prison is a factor but is minimized by the sheer volume of container traffic from high risk areas and the open access afforded by working at the port. Loss of a shipment of narcotics is viewed as a cost of doing business to the smuggling organizations. For the legitimate businesses whose merchandise and containers are used as vehicles by the narcotic trafficker, the result is financial loss due to damage and delay plus the bad publicity associated with drug smuggling.

4. What harms resulted from the problem? The evident harm is the availability of narcotics in South Florida. Internal conspiracy is the cheapest and easiest method of drug smuggling. There are no dummy companies, shipping fees or concealment costs involved. As more and more port workers become involved the conduits for narcotics increase and the enforcement task is multiplied. The chance for violence and the resulting injuries are also increased.

5. How was the problem being addressed before the problem-solving project? What were the results of those responses? After noticing the increase of this type of seizure, the Seaport ASU initially beefed up the ship side and container yard examination teams in order to better control the containers and discourage those involved. More surveillances were initiated in the hope of arresting or disrupting the smuggling organization. At first these measures met with some success. However, the results were not sustainable or significant. Arrested conspirators were quickly replaced and the seizures continued to increase.

6. What did the analysis reveal about the causes and underlying conditions that precipitated the problem? The following factors were identified as contributing to the situation:

1. The volume of legitimate traffic from "high risk" countries makes a 100% exam of all or most cargo impossible.
2. Customs personnel available could not adequately monitor port workers to have

an impact on the problem.

3. Time constraints necessitated that Customs personnel be extremely selective concerning the vessels and cargo examined. Of five possible target vessels only one could be adequately examined during a shift.
4. Due to the nature of their legitimate jobs, port worker/ILA access is constant.
- 5. ILA/port workers are allowed to bring their personal vehicles onto the port and in close proximity to both ships and container staging areas.
6. ILA/port workers have access to the port at all hours.
7. A large percentage of the ILA have criminal records including arrests for narcotics smuggling and theft.

7. What did the analysis reveal about the nature and extent of the problem? Analysis revealed that the problem was ongoing and increasing. The risk was high 24 hours a day/7 days a week with the participation of the ILA/port worker a major contributing factor.

8. What situational information was needed to better understand the problem? The SPS team obtained detailed drawings of the entire port area from the Metro Dade Port of Miami engineering department. Using seizure information, each incident was plotted and the area with the most and least occurrences identified. Times and dates were also tracked to better understand the circumstances of each seizure.

9. Was there an open discussion with the community about the problem? Attempting to get as much assistance as possible, the SPS team had meetings with the inspectors and agents who would implement the resulting plan, the Port of Miami Security department and the steam ship lines.

## C. Responses

1. What possible response alternatives were considered to deal with the problem? During "brainstorming" sessions the following courses of action were considered:

Sealing off the port to all traffic when high risk ships were in port ,

X Substantially increase the number of Customs personnel.

Require port workers/ILA to leave their personal vehicles off the port and take buses into port

Require port workers/ILA to use separate Customs manned entrances and exits.

X Put surveillance cameras up throughout the port.

Require high risk ships to unload one at a time.

X Alternate shifts for Customs personnel.

X Search everyone leaving the port.

Seal off individual yards when they are working high risk ships.

X Obtain additional National Guard personnel.

X Get shipping to provide better security.

Get Port of Miami to provide more security personnel,

X Request additional Metro-Dade police be assigned to the port.

X Establish surveillance on high risk ships instead of working all the containers.

X Control access to port.

X Do vehicle stops at main gate using k-9 units for vehicle searches.

X Alternate times and location vehicle stops.

X Lock/block all side access roads and funnel all traffic through main gate.

X Increase number and frequency of ships worked to maintain a visible presence.

X Do yard searches/sweeps with k-9 units to pressure smugglers to try and get it through the gates.

2. What responses did you use to address the problem? Using the collected data, the SPS team selected the lower risk areas and installed cameras to monitor them from the Customs offices. It was then decided to use a series of responses to try and disrupt smuggling activities. The Office of Investigations provided personnel as did Metro-Dade to supplement the inspectional staff assigned to the port. The responses selected are marked with an X above.

3. How did you develop a response as a result of your analysis? The SPS team realized that certain options, such as closing down the port to all traffic, were impractical. However, the one advantage the SPS team identified was the fact that the port had only one way on and off. Therefore, the SPS team decided that gate stops, combined with the tunneling of traffic, increased presence and yard sweeps/searches would yield the best results. The analysis allowed the SPS team to determine the best times and the best combination of tactics to use. For example, by observing and tracking the traffic leaving the port it was decided that the best opportunity for gate stops to be effective were at the start of the lunch break and at the end of the normal work day and that they should only be done for about an hour. Rolling or moving roadblocks were more effective for late night and off hour operations.

4. What evaluation criteria were most important to the department before implementation of the response alternatives? The SPS team based their alternatives on six criteria. Was the response legal, practical, reasonably safe, cost effective, effective enough to achieve the goals and did it have sufficient impact on the problem over both the short and the long term.

5. What did you intend to accomplish with your response plan? The main goal of the SPS team

was to disrupt and decrease the incidence of internal conspiracies involved in narcotic smuggling at the port of Miami. As much as it would have liked to totally stop this type of smuggling, the team realized from the analysis of the situation that too many factors existed to make that possible. The criteria used to measure success centered on tracking the occurrence of internal conspiracies, consignee and deep concealment methods of smuggling.

6. What resources were available to help solve the problem? The SPS team had available the entire Miami Seaport ASU which consisted of thirty inspectors, a container exam facility with seven forklifts and a refrigeration unit for perishables, members of the Office of Investigations which included Marine Enforcement Officers, officers from the Metro-Dade Police Department, Port of Miami Security Division Officers and members of the Florida National Guard. Funds for some of the surveillance and camera equipment were provided through the U.S. Customs Service Office of Strategic Problem Solving in Washington, D.C.

7. What was done before you implemented your response plan? Prior to implementing the plan, the SPS team collected and analyzed data, identified the problem and considered alternatives to alleviate the problem. Once a plan of action was chosen the team coordinated the allocation of resources and monitored the results.

8. What difficulties were encountered during response implementation? No plan goes off without a hitch. Initially, implementing the Miami Seaport plan caused some inconvenience to the public. Miami is the busiest cruise ship terminal in the world. Thousands of people begin their vacations four days a week by boarding a cruise ship in Miami. These people experienced some delays due to the gate stops and searches. In addition, the shipping companies and merchants experienced extra costs due to the delay of vessel operations and cargo caused by increased exams and yard sweeps/searches.



9. Who was involved in the response to your problem? See # 6 of this section.

**D. Assessment:**

1. What were the results? What degree of impact did the response plan have on this problem?

By monitoring the Miami Seaport seizure statistics and through information from informants the following results were observed:

Internal conspiracy seizures in the port of Miami decreased by 30% from the second half of fiscal year 1996 through the first half of 1997.

Narcotic traffickers began using deep concealment methods including hiding drugs further back in containers and using the structure of the container itself to secret narcotics.

Consignee seizures increased at the port of Miami to over 50%.

Port Everglades saw an increase of internal conspiracy seizures to over 70% of their totals.

The response plan displaced the problem to Port Everglades which is 15 miles north of the Port of Miami.

This is demonstrated by the seizure data. We have seized over 40,000 lbs. of drugs at the Miami seaport so far this fiscal year. While at Port Everglades we have seized over 100,000 lbs. This is the first time in the last ten years that Port Everglades' seizures have surpassed Miami's

2. What were your methods of evaluation and for how long was the effectiveness of the problem solving effort evaluated? The evaluation was based on seizure statistics and seizure comparisons for fiscal year 1996 and 1997 coupled with information gathered from informants and observable trends. Monitoring and evaluation continue to the present.

3. Who was involved in the evaluation? The SPS team collected and evaluated the information with the aid of the Office of Field Operations Miami Seaport ASU and the Office of Investigations.
4. Were there problems in implementing the response plan? See # 8 of response section.
5. If there was no improvement in the problem, were other systemic efforts considered to handle the problem? Not applicable.
6. What response goals were accomplished? There was a significant decrease in internal conspiracy seizures and the activities of these operations were disrupted.
7. How did you measure your results? Results were measured by monitoring seizure statistics, smuggling trends and through informant information.
8. How could you make your response more effective? The response would have been more effective if it could have been possible to require ILA/port workers to have criminal history checks and leave their personal vehicles off the port.
9. Was there a concern about displacement? The SPS team viewed displacement as a probable effect. Due to the proximity of Port Everglades and the cohesiveness of the ILA a total stopping of the problem was seen as doubtful.
10. Will your response require continued monitoring or a continuing effort to maintain your results? The SPS team continues to monitor and adjust the operation. They know that they must maintain the pressure on the internal conspiracy threat or it will return.

### 3. Agency and Officer Information

1. At what level of the police organization was this problem solving initiative adopted? This initiative was adopted at the port level. This is the basic level of organization within Customs.
2. Did officers receive any training in problem solving before this project began or during its execution? The SPS team members received problem solving training prior to beginning work on the problem.
3. Were additional incentives given to police officers who engaged in problem solving? Customs has a national award program to recognize problem solving teams. This team was one of the award winners for 1997. At the time the team began work they did not know there was an award program SPS is new in customs.
4. What resources and guidelines were used, if any, by police officers to help them manage this problem-solving initiative? The training package includes a pocket guide with explanation of what to do at each step of the process. Each team member receives one of these books.
5. What issues/problems were identified with the problem-solving model? The problem with the problem solving model centers around acceptance of deterrence or displacement as good outcomes of law enforcement efforts.
6. What general resource commitments were made to this project, and of those resources, what went beyond the existing department budget? The Miami seaport Anti-smuggling unit was used to carry out the action plan. This unit was already in place to perform these type duties. The high-tech cameras that were installed by Customs went beyond the port's budget. The \$88,000 for these cameras was supplied by the national Office of Strategic Problem Solving. Some of the steamship lines who carry these containers into the U.S. installed surveillance cameras on their property at their own expense.
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