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Study: Illegal immigration costs US border counties millions

The Associated Press

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PHOENIX: Costs related to illegal immigration in U.S. counties along the border with Mexico have risen to tens of millions of dollars a year, mainly because of increased law enforcement work and criminal prosecutions, according to a study to be released Wednesday.

The study commissioned by the U.S./Mexico Border Counties Coalition, a nonprofit group of border-county officials, showed that for the nation's two dozen border counties in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas, the costs related to illegal immigration in fiscal 2006 were \$192 million, more than double the costs in 1999.

"The study is important because, for the most part, these border counties are small, they're rural, they're very poor, and this is a tremendous hit to their county budgets," said Tanis Salant, a public-policy lecturer at the University of Arizona and the study's main author.

Researchers from San Diego State University also helped prepare the study.

The coalition estimated the costs of illegal immigration on county law enforcement borderwide at \$1.2 billion in the past eight fiscal years, researchers said.

The study also said money was being diverted from other law-enforcement efforts and community projects.

The coalition says Congress should spend more federal money on an assistance program that gave border counties \$4.7 million in reimbursements last year.

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