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ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS FACE CRIMINAL CHARGES FOR FIRST OFFENSES

Program is part of the Trump administration's effort to deter illegal border crossings; 565 prosecutions since June

By Associated Press
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PHOENIX – Migrants who are caught crossing the border illegally for the first time are now facing criminal charges in federal court in Arizona as the Trump administration steps up efforts to deter illegal immigration.

Until recently, first-time offenders were deported instead of being criminally prosecuted.

That changed as of June in the Tucson Sector, which includes most of Arizona's border with Mexico, the agency said in a news release on Thursday. The new program has led to 565 prosecutions.

The illegal immigrants are charged with misdemeanors and tried in federal court under Operation Streamline, a 12-year-old initiative in which the migrants are charged, enter pleas and are sentenced within a few minutes in large groups.

A recent docket for Operation Streamline, which takes place in Tucson several times a week, shows that 58 immigrants were tried on Thursday. About 35 were first-time offenders who were charged with improper entry. The rest were migrants who have previously been caught at the border and were charged with illegal re-entry.

A decline in the number of people crossing the border has freed up resources for the Border Patrol to go after first-time offenders, the agency said.

In April, the number of people apprehended on the southwest border trying to enter the U.S. [fell to its lowest level in nearly two decades](#).

The program for first-time offenders is already in place in one part of Texas and was previously in effect in Tucson, although it has been several years since it was used.

The program "is aimed specifically to deter people from coming to the country illegally in a way that prevents deaths," Tucson Sector spokesman Daniel Hernandez said. "It creates consequences in the west desert region where we're having a lot of people distressed."

The Tucson Sector has seen a rash of heat deaths and rescues during the past few weeks.