

Permission to reprint or copy this article or photo, other than personal use, must be obtained from The Seattle Times. Call 206-464-3113 or e-mail resale@seattletimes.com with your request.

Probe sought in border death

By **Thomas Watkins**
The Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The Mexican government called for an investigation Friday into a shooting by two federal agents that left one person dead at the world's busiest border crossing. A union representing the Border Patrol agent involved in the shooting defended the officer's conduct.

The shooting took place Thursday afternoon after U.S. agents surrounded a sport-utility vehicle under surveillance on suspicion of immigrant smuggling, police said.

The driver refused to get out, and when agents smashed the vehicle's window with a baton, he accelerated in the direction of five U.S. agents blocking his path and "nearly pinned an agent standing next to the vehicle," said San Diego police Lt. Jeff Sferra.

A Border Patrol agent and a U.S. Customs agent opened fire. The Border Patrol agent's shots proved fatal, police said. The driver, identified by the Mexican Consulate as Oscar Abraham Garcia, 22, of Tijuana, Mexico, was pronounced dead at the scene.

Five male passengers, all illegal Mexican immigrants, were taken into custody. Some passengers told investigators Garcia and a 17-year-old in the vehicle were both immigrant smugglers, said Alberto Lozano, spokesman for the Mexican Consulate in San Diego. Police said one person had been arrested on immigrant-smuggling charges.

No weapons were found in the vehicle, San Diego police Lt. Kevin Rooney said. Investigators have not said whether the driver had a criminal record.

Rooney said the agents who fired have been placed on administrative leave pending an investigation.

Mexican investigators were reviewing footage from security cameras at the border.

"It's worrying that someone was shot," said Luis Cabrera, the Mexican consul in San Diego. "Let's see what were the circumstances and determine if there was or was not excessive use of force."

The shooting took place on Interstate 5, about 75 feet north of the Mexican border, at the San Ysidro Port of Entry crossing that links San Diego with Tijuana. The crossing was shut down for nine hours, causing miles-long traffic jams on I-5 and Interstate 805, while the shooting was investigated.

At the time of the shooting, the vehicle was going toward the Mexico border, not away from it, police said. "They noticed they were being followed and decided they were going to go back to Mexico," Cabrera said.

Chris Bauder, president of National Border Patrol Council Local 1613, which represents Border Patrol agents in San Diego, including the one involved in shooting, said the agent followed his training.



CHRIS PARK / AP

The SUV involved in a border shooting is parked at the San Ysidro Port of Entry crossing that ties San Diego with Tijuana.