

A force to be reckoned with: strengthening borders through technology investment

Brodie Clark, Head of Border Force, UK Border Agency, Home Office, UK

On 1 April 2009 the UK Border Agency became a full executive agency of the Home Office. This follows a successful year as a shadow agency in which we brought together the work of the former Border and Immigration Agency, customs detection work at the border from HM Revenue & Customs and UK visas, to establish a single and strong border force.

As an agency we control the entry of people and goods to the UK, protecting the public from people or goods which can cause us harm, as well as protecting tax revenues. The creation of the UK Border Agency means that we are better able to deploy our resources, including a wide range of technology used to target those people who attempt to bring illegal goods and people into the UK. Technology such as x-ray scanners, carbon dioxide, drug and radiation detection machines and cameras are used together with the intelligence and skill of our officers on the frontline.

This joint approach is delivering impressive results. Since the UK Border Agency was formed in April 2008 as a shadow agency we have seized 900 million cigarettes and £300 million worth of illegal drugs at the border. What's more, in 2008 we stopped over 28,000 attempts to cross the channel illegally and searched over 1 million freight vehicles.

Screening freight

Screening technology has played an important role in helping us to achieve these results.

In the same way that baggage is scanned at an airport, we use x-ray systems to identify smuggled illegal goods such as weapons, tobacco and drugs concealed within the vehicle.

Technologies such as x-ray are Non-Intrusive Inspection (NII) systems, and can penetrate a container to produce an image of the contents. It allows us to carry out examinations of freight without having to unload the goods for manual searches, or intrusive examinations such as dismantling objects or crates.

Throughout 2009, we will be working with our partners, to install fixed x-ray systems at Dover and at our juxtaposed controls in Coquelles, France.

But it's not just illegal goods that the UK Border Agency is interested in – we also screen freight vehicles for people hiding amongst goods arriving at the French ports of Dunkirk, Coquelles and Calais. When searching for people at our juxtaposed controls in France, we use technology such as carbon dioxide monitors and heart beat detectors – as well as specially trained detector dogs.

Smugglers are increasingly organised and sophisticated in their illegal activities and it is essential that we have the necessary tools to combat this. These technologies provide the UK Border Agency with an invaluable tool when tackling border crime.

Changing world

The constant threat of criminality and terrorism has changed the way people and goods travel across the world. The UK government is investing in the latest technology to ensure the UK Border Agency can find dangerous materials earlier.

The Cyclamen Programme is the UK's radiation screening initiative designed to enhance counter-terrorism measures at the border. These radiation screening systems have been installed



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at ports and airports across the UK to detect illicit nuclear and radiological material in the stream of commerce. The radiation detection technology deployed includes fixed and mobile capabilities.

The equipment is passive, in that it does not emit radiation, but merely detects the presence of radiation as it passes through the portals.

Screening people

In addition to screening freight, we also screen passengers to detect illicit goods. Increasing passenger volumes make this a particularly tough challenge. We have installed new millimetre wave cameras at ports and airports throughout the UK which help us to identify those passengers who may be hiding something from us.

This new imaging technology measures waves naturally emitted by the human body, exposing 'cold' objects such as metal, plastic, or ceramics concealed under clothing. It doesn't generate emissions itself, but creates an image from reflected body energy.

Drug tracing machines are also used to detect traces of illegal substances on a person and even on their clothes. The machines are so sensitive they can identify minute traces of drugs including cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and cannabis, even if the person had washed their hands. The resulting reading indicates how many drugs are present in the sample and at what levels.

e-Borders

The e-Borders programme will collect and examine passenger and crew information provided in advance of travel by carriers about their journey. It allows us to count people in and out of the country and importantly, it will improve the security of the border by keeping out or monitoring individuals that would cause harm to the UK.

Since the project started in 2004, e-Borders has screened 84 million passengers travelling to and from the UK, leading to over 3,000 arrests for crimes including murder, drug dealing and sex offences. In addition, 120 fraudulently used British passports have been identified and confiscated and seven facilitators have been arrested. Over 750 people with an undesirable immigration history have been refused entry and it has also enabled the identification of £11.8 million in excise duty evasion.

The future

The UK Border Agency is continuously working to strengthen the border, while facilitating trade and travel that benefits the UK. To do this we have to constantly refine the targeting of high-risk imports and people so that we can minimise delays for legitimate business and travellers.

The creation of a single, integrated, force at the border means that we can protect our border in the 21st Century, continuing to invest and use technology to screen high-risk people, goods and freight.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brodie Clark is Head of the UK Border Force. This covers UK immigration control and frontline customs detection activity at air and sea ports, including responsibility for the operation of Juxtaposed Controls in France and Belgium. He has been in the UKBA (previously the Border and Immigration Agency) since 2003. Prior to this his career had been in the UK Prison Service where his final two Board level positions had been as Director of the High Security Estate and Director of Security.

ABOUT THE ORGANISATION

The **UK Border Agency** is responsible for securing the United Kingdom borders and controlling migration in the United Kingdom. They manage border control for the United Kingdom, enforcing immigration and customs regulations. They also consider applications for permission to enter or stay in the United Kingdom, citizenship and asylum.

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