

## Mexico: A Harbinger

There continues to be a leadership vacuum in the area of domestic cargo security within the United States. Despite noble efforts over the past few years, the government is not adequately focused on the issue and the security profession is not well organized in our approach to the problem. Losses due to cargo theft continue to mount (although attaining accurate statistics is part of the problem). Attempts by groups such as the SC-ISAC (which seeks to share information and statistics) and the recently announced Cargo Net initiative (designed to track and share cargo theft data with law enforcement) do provide rays of hope. The fact remains that our approach to the issue remains fragmented. The good news is that the losses that occur within the border of the U.S. remain largely financial in nature. Our neighbors to the south are experiencing difficulties that are significantly more violent in nature.



With the expansion of C-TPAT to Mexican truck carriers and manufacturers in recent years, the focus on anti-smuggling tactics and conveyance security has markedly improved within Mexico. Greater partnership between supply chain partners and the authorities have resulted in a significant increase in the seizure of illicit goods and narcotics at the southern border. An assumption can be made that there has been a reduction in the viability of criminal enterprises to use commercial supply chains as a conduit for their nefarious intentions. This improvement in security tactics has unfortunately come at a very high price in some instances, however. While the violence currently being experienced in Mexico may not come as a surprise to anyone who is following President Calderon's war on narco-terrorists, the impact on our brethren in the supply chain community may surprise you.

Elizabeth Velarde Miranda worked as an in-house customs broker for multinational giant Siemens in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. In October of 2009, Elizabeth was killed following an El Paso drug seizure from a trailer with merchandise from the plant in which she worked. It is believed that the seizure was the result of information provided by Siemens to CBP as part of their supply chain security protocol. Her supervisor, Jose Javier Rios Lopez, was also fatally shot while driving to work on January 18<sup>th</sup> of this year. These individuals paid the ultimate price in their country's war against the drug lords.

My friends and colleagues in Mexico simply want their country back. They are also understandably leery about the security programs the U.S. has encouraged including C-TPAT. The security community must be aware of the valid concerns of our Mexican partners and find ways to meet the goals of preventing smuggling and reducing theft while protecting the people within our supply chains. As supply chain professionals we must bring all of our talents and re-

sources to bear in order to find innovative solutions to this grave problem. Innovative approaches to technology, information sharing, conveyance security, and effective workplace violence measures are all required in this effort if Mexico is to live up to its potential as a trading partner and as a peaceful neighbor. The lessons we learn in the process will serve both of our countries and our colleagues throughout the supply chain well in the tough years to come.