

**NARCOTICS INTERDICTION:
Remote Video Inspection System Deployment
Goals Have Not Been Achieved**

OIG-02-033

January 15, 2002



Office of Inspector General

The Department of the Treasury

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Abbreviations

APP	Automated Port Program
Customs	United States Customs Service
INS	United States Immigration and Naturalization Service
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
RVIS	Remote Video Inspection System
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
The Accord	The Canada-United States of America Accord on Our Shared Border

*The Department of the Treasury
Office of Inspector General*

January 15, 2002

Mr. Robert C. Bonner
Commissioner
U.S. Customs Service

The Remote Video Inspection System (RVIS) is a joint U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and U.S. Customs Service (Customs) initiative that evolved from *The Canada-United States of America Accord on Our Shared Border*. Through the use of video technology, Customs and INS planned to offer 24-hour per day border services by the year 2000 at 22 border crossings that previously were closed during the evening and nighttime hours. It was anticipated that RVIS would facilitate the movement of low-risk travelers, while also ensuring border security.

We conducted this audit to evaluate Customs progress in implementing RVIS. We performed work from August 2000 through May 2001 at Customs headquarters, and 23 remote northern border crossings in Maine, New York, North Dakota, and Montana. Some of the crossings that we visited were planned RVIS sites and others were not. A more detailed description of our objective, scope and methodology is provided in Appendix 1.

Results in Brief

The goal of deploying RVIS at 22 locations by December 31, 2000, was not achieved. As of September 2001, only seven sites were capable of operating RVIS equipment. Poor contractor performance and a lack of strong oversight caused delays in the deployment of RVIS. Customs oversight was weak because Customs and INS did not function as "equal partners." Customs deferred to INS to oversee RVIS development. We believe Customs needed to be more proactive. To correct RVIS deficiencies, we recommended that Customs and INS develop Standard Operating Procedures and enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) more clearly delineating roles and responsibilities.

Background

Remote Ports Along The Northern Border

Many small remote ports of entry along the northern border are only opened and staffed by Customs and INS officials 8 to 12 hours per day. Travelers wanting to cross the border during the off hours are notified, via road signs, that they need to report to another port of entry (usually several miles away) where Customs and INS staff are on duty (see Figure 1 below). Although these small ports of entry are officially closed, most lack any physical barriers prohibiting crossing. Generally, orange cones are placed in the road indicating that the road is closed.

Figure 1: Sign Approaching Port At Northgate, ND



Source: OIG Photograph

Remote Video Inspection System

Over the last several years, Customs and INS have been working to develop technology to allow local residents and frequent low-risk travelers to pass through these remote ports when Customs and INS staff are not on duty. Their efforts began in 1994 when Customs and INS initiated the Automated Port Program (APP).

In 1995, the United States and Canada entered into *The Canada-United States of America Accord on Our Shared Border (The Accord)*. Under *The Accord*, both countries agreed to promote trade, enhance enforcement efforts, and facilitate the movement of people.

From *The Accord* came RVIS, in which both countries agreed to implement technology-based services that would expedite the clearance of low-risk travelers and enhance security at remote northern border crossings. Specifically, *The Accord* declared that

both governments would offer 24-hour per day border services by the year 2000 to 22 pairs of small towns that previously were closed during the evening and nighttime hours. The number of ports providing RVIS service was later expanded to 27. Customs indicated this was done through an INS appropriation for FY 1998 and that Canada never agreed to these additional locations. The RVIS ports are shown on the map below and listed in Appendix 1.

Figure 2: Map Showing RVIS Ports Along The Northern Border



Source: OIG Diagram

INS Oversaw The RVIS Contract

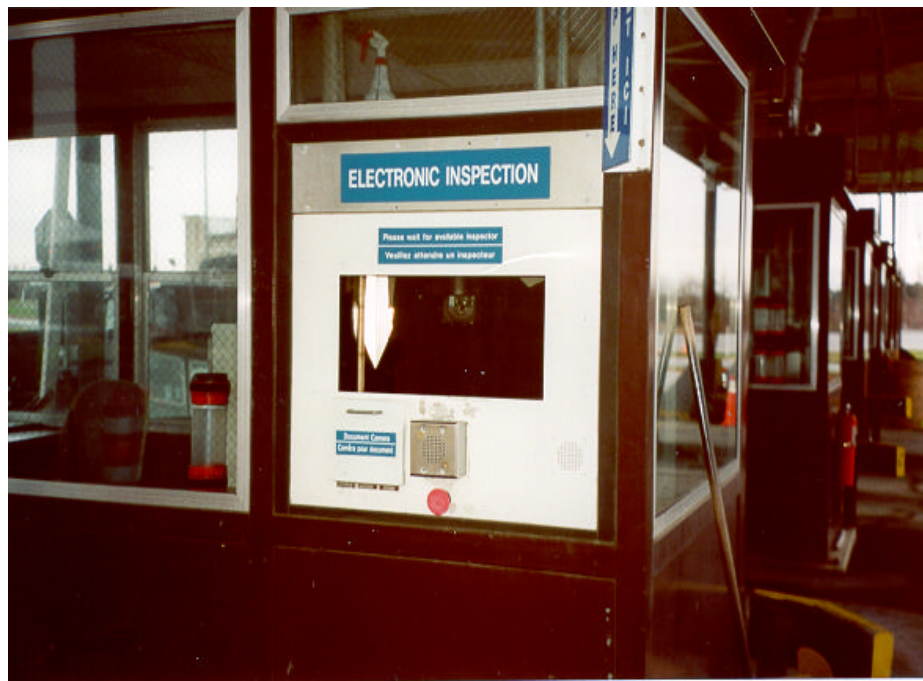
Although RVIS was to be a joint INS/Customs project, Customs officials stated that INS was congressionally mandated to take the lead on RVIS. As a result, INS was responsible for awarding and monitoring the RVIS contract.

RVIS Components

The RVIS that was developed by the INS contractor consisted of a validation system, pan/tilt/zoom video cameras, card readers, sensors, and two-way communication equipment. RVIS transmits

images of the person, the vehicle, documents and passengers to an inspector located miles away at the main monitoring, 24-hour port of entry. Inspectors trained in RVIS can examine all vehicle compartments (trunk, hood and backseat) and record license plate information. RVIS also includes a two-way speaker telephone for use whenever an inspector requires additional information or has questions for the traveler.

Figure 3: RVIS Equipment At Champlain, NY, Test Site



Source: OIG Photograph

Northern Border Alerts

Over the last 2 years, RVIS sites have been impacted by two *Level One* alerts. The first occurred in December 1999 when the Commissioner of Customs suspended the use of RVIS and staffed all northern border ports 24 hours per day. The alert status was rescinded in January 2000, except at the five border crossings that had operational RVIS equipment. These sites continued to be staffed 24 hours per day until March 1, 2001, when staffing was reduced at the five sites and RVIS was reactivated. The second

alert occurred as a result of the events of September 11, 2001. Once again, RVIS was suspended and border crossings were staffed 24 hours per day.

Finding and Recommendations

Finding 1 **RVIS Was Not Deployed In Accordance With Schedule**

The goal of deploying RVIS at 22 locations by December 2000 was not achieved. As of September 2001, only seven RVIS sites were capable of operating. The delays in deploying RVIS were caused by poor contractor performance, policy disagreements between INS and Customs, and a lack of strong oversight, as Customs deferred to INS to oversee implementation. To correct deficiencies, we recommend that Customs and INS institute Standard Operating Procedures and enter into an updated MOU with INS more clearly delineating roles and responsibilities. Of primary concern, given the current security situation, is a need to define under what circumstances, if any, non-enrolled travelers will be allowed to cross the border at RVIS sites.

Untimely Deployment Of RVIS

Our review disclosed that Customs and INS fell far short of the goal of having RVIS operating at the 22 remote ports of entry by the end of the year 2000. As of September 10, 2001 (prior to the *Level One* alert), RVIS was capable of being operational at only seven sites (Easton, Forest City, Monticello, and Orient, Maine; Pittsburgh, New Hampshire¹; and Scobey and Whitetail, Montana). As mentioned earlier, there is now 24-hour staffing at these seven ports and other locations, and neither Customs nor INS are presently relying on RVIS as a primary inspection tool.

¹ While capable of operation the Pittsburg, NH, site would not initially be in use due to a lack of enrolled travelers. According to Customs officials, Customs and INS agreed to use RVIS at Pittsburg once an enrolled population was established. To make enrollment feasible, the port hours of operation were extended.

Figure 4: Border Crossing at Orient, Maine



Source: OIG Photograph

The slow RVIS-implementation process was primarily attributable to equipment problems and the lack of timely contractor response. Customs field personnel at all of the sites we visited stated that from the very beginning there were frequent problems with RVIS equipment. Equipment malfunctioned on a regular basis and spare parts were hard to obtain. There were no local sub-contractors authorized by the contractor to respond to problems affecting the RVIS sites. The contractor sent its staff to the remote field locations to examine the problems. However, Customs personnel were quick to point out that contractor responses were often untimely and ineffective.

RVIS hardware and software have had to be continually updated and modified. Customs field personnel noted that weather problems such as blustery winds, lightning strikes, and ice and snow, negatively impacted RVIS equipment. These conditions caused equipment to fail and required numerous modifications.

These modifications resulted in additional field-testing that further delayed RVIS implementation.

In addition to weather-related problems, RVIS installation was hampered by the lack of suitable telephone communication lines required to transmit the video images inherent in the system. The remote areas selected for the RVIS equipment often lacked adequate telephone transmission lines to effectively support the equipment. As a result, video presentations were often of poor quality and delays of up to 45 seconds in transmitting live pictures occurred. Also, field personnel were told the expense involved in upgrading these telephone lines was a major factor in the untimely deployment of RVIS.

In response to our draft report, Customs indicated that all locations have subsequently been upgraded to either dedicated *T1 lines* or *satellite up-links*. We were unable to verify this information.

Documents obtained from Customs substantiated the above statements made by Customs field personnel. These documents showed that INS officials criticized the contractor for failing to perform installations, retrofits, upgrades, and maintenance, in a timely manner. INS officials reported that the contractor was over a year and a half behind schedule on some site locations, and even after failing to meet original dates, the contractor was unable to adhere to a revised delivery schedule. The contractor admitted to doing a poor job of planning, estimating, scheduling and communicating, and assured INS that it would undertake remedial actions to address the criticisms and failure of its work. The contractor reported that, beginning in October 1998, over 300 system changes had to be made.

In response to our draft report, Customs stated that the contractor had been replaced due to poor performance. Again, we were unable to verify this information.

Policy Disagreement

RVIS deployment has also been hampered by a policy disagreement between INS and Customs management regarding who should be

eligible for RVIS processing. As a result, the reactivation of RVIS, after the first alert, was delayed while INS and Customs attempted to arrive at some type of compromise.

Prior to *The Accord*, Customs and INS entered into an MOU for the APP. This agreement restricted automated port usage to low-risk travelers who had been screened for eligibility. Customs views RVIS as a program that should be restricted to local, pre-enrolled residents. However, INS personnel want other travelers to be able to cross the border under certain circumstances.

At the conclusion of the first alert, the Commissioner of Customs was against reactivation of RVIS if non-enrolled travelers were allowed to enter the country through RVIS-equipped border crossings. In a memorandum dated September 27, 2000, the Customs Deputy Commissioner informed the INS Deputy Commissioner that Customs would like to reactivate RVIS but on an enrollee-only basis. INS eventually agreed to reactivate RVIS in accordance with Customs position, but INS reserved the right to have its personnel process non-enrolled travelers under certain exigent circumstances.

Unequal Partners And Loose Oversight

The partnership of INS and Customs in the implementation of RVIS has been hampered by a lack of defined responsibilities. The MOU agreed to in 1994 did not address issues of accountability, poor contractor performance, and the resolution of operational disputes. In addition, no new agreement was entered into after *The Accord*. This has resulted in an unequal partnership, with Customs deferring to INS, particularly in the area of contractor performance.

For example, at numerous locations Customs personnel told us they had very little interaction with the contractor, and were often unaware of the current state of RVIS equipment or the extent of contractor support activities in their geographic areas. Though considered equal partners with INS, many field personnel felt that Customs was not actively involved, consulted or briefed by INS or its contractor.

These statements were confirmed by the fact that we were unable to locate any documentation that Customs personnel routinely evaluated contractor performance. Also, we found no evidence that Customs and INS conducted formal, periodic evaluations of RVIS implementation or proposed alternatives to current operational difficulties.

In response to our draft report, however, Customs took exception to our statements and conclusions about port personnel having little interaction with the contractor and being unaware of contractor plans. Customs response indicated that as of February 2001 those locations with active RVIS were informed of the contractor's plans. In addition, the draft report response said that Customs was given copies of the contractor's status reports. Further, Customs said it found additional supporting documentation from 1997-1998 to support interaction between Customs and the contractor. None of these documents were available to us during our review and, in preparing the final report, we did not verify their existence.

Another example of loose oversight is the fact that neither INS nor Customs could provide us with valid and reliable cost data for RVIS. Because INS was given the lead in this program, we presume that INS incurred most of the RVIS expenditures. We believe that Customs and INS need to address this matter by sharing information on all contractor expenditures.

The Development Of Standard Operating Procedures

Customs has begun to move toward addressing some of the RVIS deficiencies. Customs has drafted interim INS and Customs Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that address important matters such as (1) the exigent circumstances under which non-enrolled travelers may be processed, (2) joint local evaluations of RVIS performance, (3) daily system checks, and (4) data collection and sharing.

In fact, Customs said in its response to our draft report that exigent circumstances under which non-enrolled travelers may

cross the border have actually been defined and been in use since March 2001. The exigent circumstances include medical emergencies, hazardous weather conditions, minor children (5 years of age and under) traveling with an enrolled parent or guardian, and emergency or disaster relief workers in the performance of their duties. An appropriate supervisory official must approve any other considerations for humanitarian processing that are not addressed under the specified exigent circumstances.

SOP And MOU Needed

We endorse Customs efforts in developing the SOP and believe that this document should be finalized. In addition, we believe that the 1994 MOU needs to be upgraded to require Customs and INS personnel to meet periodically to discuss the current status of the RVIS program and to prepare written status reports covering issues such as contractor performance, milestones, training, and staffing. This will provide evidence to the contractor, to the public, and to Congress that INS and Customs are actively discharging their assigned responsibilities in this area.

We also believe that the MOU should address the issue of processing non-enrolled travelers. This issue is important under any circumstance, but in light of the events of September 11, it takes on extra significance.

Recommendation

1. The Commissioner of Customs should ensure that Customs establishes Standard Operating Procedures and enters into an updated Memorandum of Understanding with the Immigration and Naturalization Service which, at a minimum, should include:
 - A requirement for formal periodic written evaluations of the RIVS program by INS and Customs personnel. The evaluation should address the program's current status on a number of issues and should include action plans that address those issues that may be hampering satisfactory performance.
 - Specific guidelines covering exigent circumstances under which INS and Customs personnel would allow non-enrolled travelers to be processed at RIVS border crossings.
 - The sharing of all information on contractor financial and human resource expenditures.

Management Comment. Customs has taken steps to address the issues identified in the report and said it agreed in general with the recommendations to update and finalize Standard Operating Procedures and a Memorandum of Understanding with INS, if RIVS is operational. Customs plans to discuss the future of RIVS with INS during the second quarter of FY 2002 and, if both parties agree to resume RIVS operations, finalize Standard Operating Procedures during the third quarter of FY 2002. Customs further plans to finalize information sharing on contractor financial and human resources expenditures in the fourth quarter of FY 2002. By the first quarter of FY 2003, Customs plan to meet with INS to revise and update the Memorandum of Understanding.

OIG Comment. Under ordinary circumstances, we believe the implementation of our recommendations could be handled more expeditiously. However, considering that the future of RIVS remains uncertain, following the events of September 11, 2001,

and the subsequent increased staffing of the ports where RVIS was installed and/or planned, it seems reasonable that many of these decisions will take time to resolve. We consider this recommendation to have a satisfactory management decision pending completion of these actions.

As a further note, Customs response made numerous statements about certain details of RVIS planning and implementation that we were unable to verify. We want to note here that this information was not made available to us during our audit, despite our requests for information. For example, while we went to great lengths to obtain information about the contract history and oversight, we were not told during the audit that INS was the lead contractor as a result of a congressional mandate or that the contractor had been replaced due to poor performance. Had we known these details, we would have included this information in our report.

* * * * *

We would like to extend our appreciation to Customs for the cooperation and courtesies extended to our staff during the review. If you have any questions, please contact me at (617) 223-8640. Major contributors to the report are listed in Appendix 3.

/s/

Donald P. Benson
Regional Inspector General for Audit

Appendix 1
List Of Planned RVIS Sites

ALASKA

Scagway

MAINE

Bridgewater (test site)

Easton

Forest City

Limestone (test site)

Monticello

Orient

MINNESOTA

Noyes

Pinecreek

MONTANA

Scobey

Whitetail

Whitlash

Willow Creek Station

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Pittsburg

NEW YORK

Cannons Corner

Champlain (test site)

Churubusco

Jamisons Line

Mooers (test site)

NORTH DAKOTA

Ambrose

Carbury

Hansboro

Hannah

Maida

Northgate

WASHINGTON

Ferry

Nighthawk

The objective of this audit was to determine whether RVIS has been an effective system in facilitating the movement of low-risk travelers while also ensuring border security at remote border crossings on the northern border. To achieve this objective we reviewed provisions of *The Canada-United States of America Accord on Our Shared Border*. We also reviewed a Customs and INS MOU on the Automated Port Program, RVIS operating manuals, Customs press releases, as well as pertinent congressional testimony by INS and Customs officials. We analyzed statistics pertaining to the processing of travelers at specific remote ports of entry.

We interviewed Customs field personnel at the following RVIS sites:

Easton, Maine	Ambrose, North Dakota
Monticello, Maine	Scobey, Montana
Limestone, Maine	Whitetail, Montana
Orient, Maine	Mooers, New York
Forest City, Maine	Champlain, New York
Bridgewater, Maine	

We also visited remote border crossings and monitoring ports that are scheduled for future RVIS deployment as well as others that were not scheduled for RVIS. The locations visited were:

Opheim, Montana	Northgate, North Dakota
Raymond, Montana	Sherwood, North Dakota
Fortuna, North Dakota	Antler, North Dakota
Noonan, North Dakota	Westhope, North Dakota
Carbury, North Dakota	Jamieson's Line, New York
Houlton, Maine	Cannons Corner, New York

We attempted to determine the amount of funds expended by Customs in the development and installation of the RVIS equipment. We reviewed evaluations conducted by INS and Customs personnel regarding contractor performance. We also spoke with Customs personnel at Customs Headquarters concerning RVIS effectiveness, the current status of the program, and its future deployment.

Appendix 2
Objectives, Scope, And Methodology

Audit work was performed from August 2000 through May 2001. We conducted our audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.



U.S. Customs Service

Memorandum

DATE: **December 20, 2001**

FILE: AUD-1-OP SM

MEMORANDUM FOR DONALD P. BENSON
REGIONAL INSPECTOR GENERAL FOR AUDIT

FROM Director,
Office of Planning

SUBJECT: Draft Audit Report on the Remote Video Inspection
System

Thank you for providing us with a copy of your draft report entitled "Narcotics Interdiction: Remote Video Inspection System Deployment Goals Have Not Been Achieved" and the opportunity to discuss the issues in this report.

Customs had taken a number of steps to address the issues identified during your review. Customs agrees in general with the recommendations to update and finalize Standard Operating Procedures and a Memorandum of Understanding with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS).

Attached are comments specific to this draft report that relate to statements that need to be clarified prior to finalization of this report.

Customs sets as interim milestones:

- Second Quarter FY 2002 – Conduct a meeting between INS and Customs to discuss the future of the Remote Video Inspection System given the events of September 11, 2001. RVIS sites are currently manned with two inspectors on a twenty-four hour basis. The equipment is not used except as a security feature at some ports.
- Third Quarter FY 2002 – If both parties agree to resume operation of RVIS, the program will become operational and a Standard Operating Procedure will be finalized. If both parties cannot agree to reopen RVIS, the issue will be made an issue at an Accord meeting.
- Fourth Quarter FY 2002 – If RVIS is operational, then Customs and INS will meet to finalize information sharing on contractor financial and human resources expenditures.
- First Quarter FY 2003 – If RVIS is operational, Customs and INS will meet to revise and update the existing Memorandum of Understanding.

TRADITION

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SERVICE

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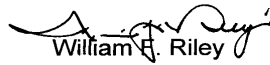
HONOR

Appendix 3
Management Comments

2

We have determined that the information in the audit does not warrant protection under the Freedom of Information Act.

If you have any questions regarding the attached comments, please have a member of your staff contact Ms. Sandy Manuel at (202) 927-2096.



William E. Riley

Attachment

RVIS OIG Draft Comments

Page 5

- The document states that RVIS was expanded from 22-27 ports. The accord was not expanded; Congress mandated INS via an appropriations bill to implement RVIS at additional locations. Canada never agreed to these additional locations.
- The report states that INS and Customs made a verbal agreement to give INS the contractual lead. All involved are sure that this was a congressional mandate. Also the LPR system was initially an intricate part of the APP/RVIS concept that was later dropped.

Page 7

- The footnote states that Pittsburg, NH would not be used due to a lack of an enrolled population. Customs and INS agreed to use RVIS at Pittsburg, once an enrolled population was established. The port hours of operation were extended to make enrollment feasible.
- The report insinuates that Customs has unilaterally closed RVIS as of 9/11 and is staffing the locations on its own. This is incorrect as both agencies agreed to closing of RVIS and are sharing in the staffing responsibilities.

Page 9

- The report states that video presentation is poor and can be up to 40 seconds delayed. All locations have been upgraded to either dedicated T1 lines or satellite up-links. All future locations will use either T1 lines or satellites; infrastructure upgrades have already been done at most of the proposed locations (T1 lines have been dropped).
- The document does not state that the contractor has been replaced due to their poor performance.

Page 10

- The report states that exigent circumstances have not been defined, as stated later in the document (page 11) exigent circumstances have been defined and all operations since March 1, 2001, have been done using the agreed on definition.
- The statement on the lack of contractor and Customs interaction is incorrect. As of February 2001, at those locations where RVIS was active, the port was informed of the contractor's plans. Customs was also given copies of the contractor's status reports. Additional supporting documents, from 1997-98, have been found supporting this interaction.

Page 11

- The last paragraph states “We also believe that the MOU and SOP should address the issue of processing non-enrolled travelers.” This statement seems contradictory to paragraph #2, which states that “Customs has drafted interim INS and Customs Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) that address important matters such as (1) the exigent circumstances under which non-enrolled travelers may be processed”.

Northeastern Region

Donald P. Benson, Regional Inspector General for Audit
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The Department of the Treasury

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U. S. Customs Service

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OIG Budget Examiner