

I ask unanimous consent to enter into the record an article from the Houston Chronicle titled "*Texas Troopers told to push children into Rio Grande, Deny water to migrants, records say*".

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Jackson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "S" and a long, sweeping underline.

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Exclusive: Texas troopers told to push children into Rio Grande, deny water to migrants, records say



Benjamin Wermund

Updated: July 17, 2023 9:41 p.m.



Migrants cool themselves in the waters of the Rio Grande after crossing to the U.S. from Mexico near a site where the state is installing large buoys to be used as a border barrier along the Rio Grande near Eagle Pass, Texas, Monday, July 10, 2023. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)
Eric Gay/Associated Press

WASHINGTON – Officers working for Gov. Greg Abbott's border security initiative have been ordered to push small children and nursing babies back into the Rio Grande, and have been told not to give water to asylum seekers even in extreme heat, according to an email from a Department of Public Safety trooper who described the actions as “inhumane.”

The July 3 account, reviewed by Hearst Newspapers, discloses several previously unreported incidents the trooper witnessed in Eagle Pass, where the state of Texas has strung miles of razor wire and deployed a wall of buoys in the Rio Grande.

According to the email, a pregnant woman having a miscarriage was found late last month caught in the wire, doubled over in pain. A four-year-old girl passed out from heat exhaustion after she tried to go through it and was pushed back by Texas National Guard soldiers. A teenager broke his leg trying to navigate the water around the wire and had to be carried by his father.

The email, which the trooper sent to a superior, suggests that Texas has set “traps” of razor wire-wrapped barrels in parts of the river with high water and low visibility. And it says the wire has increased the risk of drownings by forcing migrants into deeper

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stretches of the river.

The trooper called for a series of rigorous policy changes to improve safety for migrants, including removing the barrels and revoking the directive on withholding water.

“Due to the extreme heat, the order to not give people water needs to be immediately reversed as well,” the trooper wrote, later adding: “I believe we have stepped over a line into the inhumane.”

Migrants walk along concertina wire blocking their entrance to the U.S. in Eagle Pass, Texas, Monday, July 10, 2023.
Jerry Lara/San Antonio Express-News

Department of Public Safety spokesman Travis Considine did not comment on all the contents of the trooper’s email, but said there is no policy against giving water to migrants.

Considine also provided an email from DPS Director Steven McCraw on Saturday calling for an audit to determine if more can be done to minimize the risk to migrants. McCraw wrote troopers should warn migrants not to cross the wire, redirect them to ports of entry and to closely watch for anyone who needs medical attention.

In another email, McCraw acknowledged that there has been an increase in injuries from the wire, including seven incidents reported by Border Patrol where migrants needed “elevated medical attention” from July 4 to July 13. Those were in addition to the incidents detailed by the trooper.

“The purpose of the wire is to deter smuggling between the ports of entry and not to injure migrants,” McCraw wrote. “The smugglers care not if the migrants are injured, but we do, and we must take all necessary measures to mitigate the risk to them including injuries from trying to cross over the concertina wire, drownings and dehydration.”

Texas Department of Public Safety personnel are seen in a closed off area of a public park by the Rio Grande in Eagle Pass, Texas, Monday, July 10, 2023.
Jerry Lara/San Antonio Express-News

The incidents detailed in the email come as Abbott has stepped up efforts in recent weeks to physically bar migrants from entering the country through his Operation Lone Star initiative, escalating tensions between state and federal officials and drawing increased scrutiny from humanitarian groups who say the state is endangering asylum seekers. The most aggressive initiatives have been targeted at Eagle Pass.

The state has also now deployed a wall of floating buoys in the Rio Grande, which triggered complaints over the weekend from Mexico.

Federal Border Patrol officials have issued internal warnings that the razor wire is preventing their agents from reaching at-risk migrants and increasing the risk of drownings in the Rio Grande, Hearst Newspapers reported last week.

The DPS trooper expressed similar concerns, writing that the placement of the wire along the river “forces people to cross in other areas that are deeper and not as safe for people carrying kids and bags.”

The trooper’s email sheds new light on a series of previously reported drownings in the river during a one-week stretch earlier this month, including a mother and at least one of her two children, who federal Border Patrol agents spotted struggling to cross the Rio Grande on July 1.

According to the email, a DPS boat found the mother and one of the children, who went under the water for a minute. They were pulled from the river and given medical care before being transferred to EMS, but were later declared deceased at the hospital. The second child was never found, the email said.

The governor has said he is taking necessary steps to secure the border and accused federal officials of refusing to do so.

“Texas is deploying every tool and strategy to deter and repel illegal crossings between ports of entry as President Biden’s dangerous open border policies entice migrants from over 150 countries to risk their lives entering the country illegally,” said Andrew Mahaleris, Abbott’s press secretary. “President Biden has unleashed a chaos on the border that’s unsustainable, and we have a constitutional duty to respond to this unprecedented crisis.”

Migrants cross the Rio Grande as state troopers guard workers installing buoys on the Rio Grande south of Eagle Pass, Texas, Monday, July 10, 2023.
Jerry Lara/San Antonio Express-News

The DPS trooper's email details four incidents in just one day in which migrants were caught in the wire or injured trying to get around it.

On June 30, troopers found a group of people along the wire, including a 4-year-old girl who tried to cross the wire and was pressed back by Texas Guard soldiers "due to the orders given to them," the email says. The DPS trooper wrote that the temperature was "well over 100 degrees" and the girl passed out from exhaustion.

"We provided treatment to the unresponsive patient and transferred care to EMS," the trooper wrote. A spokesperson for the Texas National Guard did not respond to a request for comment.

In another instance, troopers found a 19-year-old woman "in obvious pain" stuck in the wire. She was cut free and given a medical assessment, which determined she was pregnant and having a miscarriage. She was then transferred to EMS.

The trooper also treated a man with a "significant laceration" in his left leg, who said he had cut it while trying to free his child who was "stuck on a trap in the water," describing a barrel with razor wire "all over it." And the trooper treated a 15-year-old boy who broke his right leg walking in the river because the razor wire was "laid out in a manner that it forced him into the river where it is unsafe to travel."

In another instance, on June 25, troopers came across a group of 120 people camped out along a fence set up along the river. The group included several small children and babies who were nursing, the trooper wrote. The entire group was exhausted, hungry and tired, the trooper wrote. The shift officer in command ordered the troopers to "push the people back into the water to go to Mexico," the email says.

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The trooper wrote that the troopers decided it was not the right thing to do “with the very real potential of exhausted people drowning.” They called command again and expressed their concerns and were given the order to “tell them to go to Mexico and get into our vehicle and leave,” the trooper wrote. After they left, other troopers worked with Border Patrol to provide care to the migrants, the email said.

Migrants trying to enter the U.S. from Mexico approach the site where workers are assembling large buoys to be used as a border barrier along the banks of the Rio Grande in Eagle Pass, Texas, Tuesday, July 11, 2023.

Eric Gay/AP

The trooper did not respond to a request for comment Monday. His email was shared by a confidential source with knowledge of border operations. It was unclear whether the trooper received a response from the sergeant he’d messaged.

Considine acknowledged that DPS was aware of the email and provided the additional agency emails in response. Those emails detail seven other incidents reported by federal border agents in which migrants were injured on the wires, including a child who was taken to the hospital on Thursday with cuts on his left arm, a mother and child who were taken to the hospital on Wednesday with “minor lacerations” on their “lower extremities,” and another migrant taken to San Antonio on July 4 to receive treatment for “several lacerations” that required staples.

Victor Escalon, a DPS director who oversees South Texas, wrote in an email Friday to other agency officials that troopers “may need to open the wire to aid individuals in medical distress, maintain the peace, and/or to make an arrest for criminal trespass, criminal mischief, acts of violence, or other State crimes.

“Our DPS medical unit is assigned to this operation to address medical concerns for everyone involved,” Escalon wrote. “As we enforce State law, we may need to aid those in medical distress and provide water as necessary.”



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Reach Benjamin on