



U.S. agencies advise caution when in Mexico



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Members of U.S. government agencies have been stepping forward with advice on travel to Mexico in recent weeks, but they are not always saying the same thing.

The State Department normally is responsible for evaluating travel conditions for U.S. citizens worldwide. It includes Mexico in its "Travel Alert" category, recommending "common sense precautions such as visiting only legitimate business and tourist areas during daylight hours."

The Los Angeles office of the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, an agency that does not normally evaluate foreign travel conditions, issued a statement this month from its special agent in charge, John Torres. It discouraged students from visiting Rosarito Beach and Tijuana because of drug-related violence.

But the office's stance appears to have softened.

"We're not telling them not to go, we're asking them to heed the warning on the State Department Travel Alert," spokesman Michael Hoffman said.

During congressional testimony this month, Alonzo Peña, the Department of Homeland Security's attaché in Mexico City, said, "I can't minimize that some innocent people have been affected, but it's not the climate that I believe is being portrayed."

Asked by Rep. Loretta Sanchez, D-Santa Ana, whether her 70-year-old mother would be safe when driving to her second home in Ensenada, Peña responded:

"Yes ma'am, she certainly would."

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