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Mexico Deports Hundreds of U.S. Teenagers

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Reuters

TIJUANA, Mexico (Reuters) - Authorities closed three rehabilitation centers in northern Mexico this week and deported hundreds of U.S. teenagers sent there for treatment of drug, alcohol or behavior problems, immigration officials said on Saturday.

Authorities shut the three centers in the Baja California towns of Ensenada and Rosarito on Friday and began deporting 590 youths, many of whom were in Mexico illegally.

A man who answered the phone at one of the centers identified by the immigration officials, the House of Hope Academy in the Pacific coastal town of Ensenada, refused to comment.

The other two centers could not be immediately identified and contacted for comment.

Mexico investigated the centers after complaints of maltreatment, and found the youths had entered Mexico as tourists, not residents of treatment programs, the National Immigration Institute said.

Immigration officials also said at least one of the centers was run by an American who had also entered on a tourist visa and had no legal right to run a business in Mexico.

"Seventy-five percent of the undocumented Americans have left the country. The rest will stay in the care of the U.S. Consulate in Tijuana until their parents are contacted," said Raul Zarate, spokesman for the immigration institute.

The youths were residents at the centers, which treat behavioral problems, drug and alcohol abuse, the Mexican authorities said.

The immigration institute said in a statement the centers had been closed temporarily by the state health ministry after patients complained of physical and psychological abuses.

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