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Fort Worth, February 12 (RHC)-- A report that 81 migrants were trapped in the back of a tanker truck in Texas, struggling to breathe has prompted U.S. authorities to launch an investigation. Earlier this week, a man called 911, saying he along with 80 other undocumented migrants were trapped in the back of a truck he thought was parked on a roadside, according to a recording of the call obtained by CBS News.

The caller told the dispatcher in Spanish: "We need help," while others could be heard yelling, crying and breathing heavily throughout the nearly four-minute call. "We are dying," the man said. "We don't have any more oxygen," he added.

"How many people are there?" the dispatcher asked soon after, but the call dropped just after the man said there were 80 people. An official with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) said on Thursday the agency's investigative unit is trying to learn if the incident may have been human trafficking.

"At face value, it's at least human smuggling," said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter. "It's heartbreaking to hear because clearly behind the caller in the background, you can hear others in the car, in the trailer, and they're also screaming for help in Spanish and saying that they're out of air," the Bexar county sheriff, Javier Salazar said in an interview with local radio station KABB.

The investigation comes as U.S. authorities have been arresting more and more migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border after a steep drop at the start of the coronavirus pandemic. In January, authorities reported nearly 78,000 migrants attempting to cross the southern border illegally or who were denied at ports of entry, showing a 6% rise over the previous month.

In 2017, 10 migrants from Mexico lost their lives after they were trapped in a tractor-trailer which was left parked outside a Walmart in San Antonio. The incident marked one of the deadliest migrant-smuggling incidents in the U.S. since May 2003, when authorities discovered 19 bodies in a milk truck abandoned at a truck stop in Victoria, 120 miles south-east of San Antonio.

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