

Shootout in Mexico kills 4 smugglers

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MEXICO CITY --

Four purported drug smugglers were killed in a shootout with soldiers in western Mexico on Monday, the second deadly clash in a week between traffickers and troops in the same remote, mountainous region.

The clash took place in Apatzingan, 125 miles west of Mexico's capital in Michoacan state, and left three men and one woman dead, said Magdalena Guzman, spokeswoman for the state prosecutor's office.

The Defense Department said in a news release that three soldiers were injured in the shootout. The soldiers were raiding a house of suspected drug traffickers, who resisted with automatic rifle fire and grenades, it said.

Plagued by drug violence, Michoacan is the target of a military-led anti-drug offensive. Last week, five soldiers, including a colonel, and a suspected drug cartel enforcer were killed in a shootout not far from Monday's killings.

President Felipe Calderon has sent some 6,000 soldiers to his home state of Michoacan as part of a nationwide anti-drug crackdown involving more than 20,000 agents.

More than 900 people have died so far this year from drug violence in Mexico, according to the Mexican daily newspaper Milenio. Authorities have declined to give an official count.