



[FBI Priorities](#)  
[About Us](#)  
[Press Room](#)  
[What We Investigate](#)  
[Counterterrorism](#)  
[Directorate of Intelligence](#)  
[Most Wanted](#)  
[Law Enforcement Services](#)  
[Your Local FBI Office](#)  
[Reports & Publications](#)  
[FBI History](#)  
[For the Family](#)  
[FOIA Library / Requests](#)  
[Employment](#)  
[How Do I...](#)  
[Search](#)  
[Home](#)

## Headline Archives

### CRACKING DOWN ON PUBLIC CORRUPTION Why We Take It So Seriously...and Why It Matters To You

06/20/05



*Fraud program at FBI Headquarters.*

*It's #4 in our top 10 list of investigative priorities—following counterterrorism, espionage, and cyber. Why do we rank it so highly? What are we doing to stop it? For the answers to these questions and more, we talked with Supervisory Special Agent Dan O'Brien, chief of our Public Corruption and Government*

[Headline Archives](#)

[Headline Story Index](#)

#### 2005

[- January](#)  
[- February](#)  
[- March](#)  
[- April](#)  
[- May](#)  
[- June](#)  
[- July](#)

#### 2004

[- January](#)  
[- February](#)  
[- March](#)  
[- April](#)  
[- May](#)  
[- June](#)  
[- July](#)  
[- August](#)  
[- September](#)  
[- October](#)  
[- November](#)  
[- December](#)

#### 2003

[- July](#)  
[- August](#)  
[- September](#)  
[- October](#)  
[- November](#)  
[- December](#)

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#### **Q: Why's the FBI so concerned about public corruption?**

**Dan:** Two main reasons. First, it strikes at the core of what our country's about. Our democracy depends on a healthy, efficient, and ethical government—whether it's in the courtroom or the halls of Congress. Second, public corruption can have a direct impact on national security. For example, in a recent case in Arizona, 26 current and former department of motor vehicles (DMV) employees were indicted for taking cash bribes for fake driver's licenses, ID cards, and even a hazmat license. What if it's a terrorist trying to get one of those licenses? We've also seen bribes paid at our borders to let drugs come into the country. Again, what if a bribe lets a terrorist get through?

#### **Q: What kinds of crimes are involved?**

**Dan:** They run the gamut. Embezzlement. Voter fraud. Subsidy fraud. Illegal kickbacks. For example, a health inspector might threaten to report code violations unless a restaurant owner pays a bribe. Or a government official might award a contract in exchange for free work on his home or some other favor.

#### **Q: What are you doing to stop public corruption?**

**Dan:** Plenty. We've got a strong national program with agents in place around the nation dedicated to the issue. In our investigations, we use every tool we've got—our cyber capabilities, our surveillance skills, our ability to track financial dealings around the world. Last year, we opened over 900 cases, which led to over 650 convictions or guilty pleas. We're also proactive. We've got analysts specifically trained to uncover corruption, and our agents always have an eye out for new and evolving angles. We've got a new initiative to identify

DMV employees nationwide who issue fraudulent IDs for bribes and kickbacks. And we're working with state governments to identify fraud and ways to prevent it.

**Q: Does public corruption really have an impact on people's lives?**

**Dan:** Absolutely. Public corruption can take funding away from your child's school and even prevent your street from being re-paved. Police who take bribes endanger your neighborhood. And guess who ultimately foots the bill for these crimes? We all do...through higher taxes. The Government Accountability Office estimates that at least 10 percent of the funding for federal government programs is lost to public corruption and government fraud every year. We're talking tens of billions of dollars.

**Q: Last question: what should people do if they come across evidence of public corruption activities?**

**Dan:** By all means, [call us!](#) If you don't want to give your name, leave an anonymous tip.

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