

Highlights of [GAO-13-330T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Within DHS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Border Patrol has primary responsibility for securing the southwest border between ports of entry. CBP reported apprehending over 327,000 illegal entrants and making over 17,150 seizures of drugs along the border in fiscal year 2011. Across the border, most apprehensions (over 38 percent) and drug seizures (28 percent) occurred in the Tucson sector. This statement discusses (1) apprehension and other data CBP collects to inform changes in southwest border security and data used to show effectiveness of resource deployments, and (2) the extent to which Border Patrol has developed goals and measures to identify resource needs under its new strategic plan. This statement is based on GAO's December 2012 report on CBP's management of southwest border resources and prior reports on DHS's efforts to measure border security, with selected updates from February 2013 on Border Patrol fiscal year 2012 operations data. To conduct prior work, GAO analyzed DHS documents and data from fiscal years 2006 to 2011, and interviewed CBP officials, among other things. To conduct selected updates, GAO reviewed Border Patrol data and interviewed Border Patrol officials.

What GAO Recommends

In a December 2012 report, GAO recommended that CBP ensure Border Patrol develops milestones and time frames for developing border security goals and measures to assess progress made and inform resource needs. DHS concurred with these recommendations and plans to address them.

View [GAO-13-330T](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

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BORDER PATROL

Goals and Measures Not Yet in Place to Inform Border Security Status and Resource Needs

What GAO Found

Since fiscal year 2011, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has used changes in the number of apprehensions on the southwest border between ports of entry as an interim measure for border security as reported in its annual performance plans. In fiscal year 2011, DHS reported a decrease in apprehensions, which met its goal to secure the southwest border. Our analysis of Border Patrol data showed that apprehensions decreased within each southwest border sector from fiscal years 2006 to 2011, generally mirroring decreases in estimated known illegal entries. Border Patrol attributed these decreases in part to changes in the U.S. economy and improved enforcement efforts. In addition to apprehension data, sector management collect and use other data to assess enforcement efforts within sectors. Our analysis of these data show that the percentage of estimated known illegal entrants apprehended from fiscal years 2006 to 2011 varied across southwest border sectors; in the Tucson sector, for example, there was little change in the percentage of estimated known illegal entrants apprehended over this time period. The percentage of individuals apprehended who repeatedly crossed the border illegally declined across the border by 6 percent from fiscal years 2008 to 2011. Further, the number of seizures of drugs and other contraband across the border increased from 10,321 in fiscal year 2006 to 18,898 in fiscal year 2011. Additionally, southwest border sectors scheduled more agent workdays in fiscal year 2011 to enforcement activities for patrolling the border than for any other enforcement activity. The Tucson sector, for example, scheduled 73 percent of workdays for enforcement activities; of these, 71 percent were scheduled for patrolling within 25 miles of the border. Other sectors scheduled from 44 to 70 percent of enforcement workdays for patrolling the border. Sectors assess how effectively they use resources to secure the border, but differences in how they collect and report data preclude comparing results. Border Patrol issued guidance in September 2012 to improve the consistency of sector data collection and reporting, which may allow comparison of performance in the future.

Border Patrol is developing performance goals and measures to define border security and the resources needed to achieve it, but has not identified milestones and time frames for developing and implementing goals and measures under its new strategic plan. Prior to fiscal year 2011, DHS used operational control—the number of border miles where Border Patrol had the capability to detect, respond to, and interdict cross-border illegal activity—as its goal and measure for border security and to assess resource needs to accomplish this goal. At the end of fiscal year 2010, DHS reported achieving varying levels of operational control of 873 (44 percent) of the nearly 2,000 southwest border miles. In fiscal year 2011, citing a need to establish new goals and measures that reflect a more quantitative methodology and an evolving vision for border control, DHS transitioned to using the number of apprehensions on the southwest border as an interim goal and measure. As GAO previously testified, this interim measure, which reports on program activity levels and not program results, limits DHS and congressional oversight and accountability. Milestones and time frames could assist Border Patrol in monitoring progress in developing goals and measures necessary to assess the status of border security and the extent to which existing resources and capabilities are appropriate and sufficient.