

## Why GAO Did This Study

As part of its mission, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), through its U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) component, is to secure U.S. borders against threats of terrorism; the smuggling of drugs, humans, and other contraband; and illegal migration. At the end of fiscal year 2010, DHS investments in border security had grown to \$11.9 billion and included more than 40,000 personnel. To secure the border, DHS coordinates with federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian partners. This testimony addresses DHS (1) capabilities to enforce security at or near the border, (2) interagency coordination and oversight of information sharing and enforcement efforts, and (3) management of technology programs. This testimony is based on related GAO work from 2007 to the present and selected updates made in February and March 2011. For the updates, GAO obtained information on CBP performance measures and interviewed relevant officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making any new recommendations in this testimony. However, GAO has previously made recommendations to DHS to strengthen border security, including enhancing measures to protect against the entry of terrorists, inadmissible aliens, and contraband; improving interagency coordination; and strengthening technology acquisition and deployment plans. DHS generally concurred with these recommendations and has actions underway or planned in response.

View [GAO-11-508T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Richard M. Stana at (202) 512-8777 or [StanaR@gao.gov](mailto:StanaR@gao.gov).

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## BORDER SECURITY

### DHS Progress and Challenges in Securing the U.S. Southwest and Northern Borders

## What GAO Found

CBP significantly increased personnel and resources for border security at and between the ports of entry (POE), and reported some success in interdicting illegal cross-border activity; however, weaknesses remain. At the POEs, for example, CBP reported that deployment of imaging technology to detect stowaways or cargo had increased seizures of drugs and other contraband, and between the POEs, increased staffing, border fencing, and technology have resulted in some success in reducing the volume of illegal migration and increasing drug seizures. However, as GAO reported from 2007 through 2011, weaknesses in POE traveler inspection procedures and infrastructure increased the potential that dangerous people and illegal goods could enter the country; and that currency and firearms could leave the country and finance drug trafficking organizations and sponsors of terrorism. CBP used a performance measure to reflect results of its overall border enforcement efforts, which showed few land border miles where they have the capability to deter or apprehend illegal activity at the immediate border in fiscal year 2010. DHS is developing a new methodology and performance measures for border security and plans to implement them in fiscal year 2012.

As GAO reported in 2010, federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian law enforcement partners reported improved DHS coordination to secure the border, but critical gaps exist. For example, interagency forums helped in establishing a common understanding of border security threats, while joint operations helped to achieve an integrated and effective law enforcement response. However, significant gaps remained in sharing information and resources useful for operations, such as daily patrols in vulnerable areas, like National Parks and Forests. As GAO reported, and made related recommendations, improved coordination provides opportunity to enhance border security efforts on the southwest and northern borders, including those to deter alien smuggling.

CBP's Border Patrol component is moving ahead with a new technology deployment plan to secure the border, but cost and operational effectiveness and suitability are not yet clear. In January 2011, the Secretary of Homeland Security announced a new direction to deploying technology to assist in securing the border. The decision ended the Secure Border Initiative Network technology program—one part of a multiyear, multibillion dollar effort aimed at securing the border through technology such as radar, sensors, and cameras and infrastructure such as fencing. Under a new plan, called Alternative (Southwest) Border Technology, Border Patrol is to develop terrain- and population-based solutions using existing proven technology, such as camera-based surveillance systems. However, the analysis DHS performed to arrive at an appropriate mix of technology in its new plan raises questions. For example, the analysis cited a range of uncertainties in costs and effectiveness, with no clear-cut cost effective technology alternative among those considered, as GAO reported in preliminary observations in March 2011. GAO will continue to assess this issue and report its results later this year.