

Why GAO Did This Study

Within DHS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Border Patrol has primary responsibility for securing the border between ports of entry, and reported that with its 18,500 agents it apprehended over 327,000 illegal entrants at the southwest border in fiscal year 2011. Across Border Patrol's nine southwest border sectors, most apprehensions occurred in the Tucson sector in Arizona. GAO was asked to review how Border Patrol manages resources at the southwest border. This report examines (1) apprehension and other data Border Patrol collects to inform changes in border security for the southwest border and the Tucson sector, in particular; (2) how the Tucson sector compares with other sectors in scheduling agent deployment and to what extent data show that deployments have been effective; and (3) the extent to which Border Patrol has identified mechanisms to assess resource needs under its new strategic plan. GAO analyzed DHS documents and data from fiscal years 2006 to 2011, and interviewed officials in headquarters and five southwest border sectors selected based on cross-border illegal activity, among other things. Results cannot be generalized across the southwest border, but provided insights into Border Patrol operations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CBP ensure Border Patrol develops milestones and time frames for developing border security goals and measures to assess progress made and resource needs. DHS concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-13-25](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

BORDER PATROL

Key Elements of New Strategic Plan Not Yet in Place to Inform Border Security Status and Resource Needs

What GAO Found

In fiscal year 2011, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported data meeting its goal to secure the land border with a decrease in apprehensions; our data analysis showed that apprehensions decreased within each southwest border sector and by 68 percent in the Tucson sector from fiscal years 2006 to 2011, due in part to changes in the U.S. economy and achievement of Border Patrol strategic objectives. These data generally mirrored the decrease in estimated known illegal entries across locations. Other data are used by Border Patrol sector management to assess efforts in securing the border against the threat of illegal migration, drug smuggling, and terrorism; and Border Patrol may use these data to assess border security at the national level as the agency transitions to a new strategic plan. Our analysis of these data indicated that in the Tucson sector, there was little change in the percentage of estimated known illegal entrants apprehended by Border Patrol over the past 5 fiscal years, and the percentage of individuals apprehended who repeatedly crossed the border illegally declined across the southwest border by 6 percent from fiscal years 2008 to 2011. Additionally, the number of drug seizures increased from 10,321 in fiscal year 2006 to 18,898 in fiscal year 2011, and apprehensions of aliens from countries determined to be at an increased risk of sponsoring terrorism increased from 239 in fiscal year 2006 to 309 in fiscal year 2010, but decreased to 253 in fiscal year 2011.

The Tucson sector scheduled more agent workdays in fiscal year 2011 for enforcement activities related to patrolling the border than other sectors; however, data limitations preclude comparison of overall effectiveness in how each sector has deployed resources to secure the border. In fiscal year 2011 the Tucson sector scheduled 73 percent of agent workdays for enforcement activities, and of these activities, 71 percent were scheduled for patrolling within 25 miles of the border. Other sectors scheduled from 44 to 70 percent of agent enforcement workdays for patrolling the border. Border Patrol sectors assess how effectively they use resources to secure the border, but differences in how sectors collect and report the data preclude comparing results. Border Patrol issued guidance in September 2012 to improve the consistency of sector data collection and reporting, which may allow future comparison of performance.

Border Patrol is developing key elements of its 2012-2016 Strategic Plan needed to define border security and the resources necessary to achieve it, but has not identified milestones and time frames for developing and implementing performance goals and measures in accordance with standard practices in program management. Border Patrol officials stated that performance goals and measures are in development for assessing the progress of agency efforts to secure the border between the ports of entry, and since fiscal year 2011, DHS has used the number of apprehensions on the southwest border as an interim goal and measure. However, as GAO previously testified, this interim measure does not inform program results and therefore 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. Border Patrol expects to implement other key elements of its strategic plan over the next 2 fiscal years.