

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-331](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal years 2013 through 2015, Border Patrol recorded a total of 2.1 million estimated known illegal entries between ports of entry along the southwest border. In an effort to secure the border between ports of entry, CBP spent approximately \$2.4 billion between fiscal years 2007 and 2015 to deploy TI — fencing, gates, roads, bridges, lighting, and drainage infrastructure—along the nearly 2,000 mile southwest border.

GAO was asked to review the use of border fencing along the southwest border. In this report, GAO examines (1) border fencing's intended contributions to border security operations and the extent to which CBP has assessed these contributions and (2) the extent that CBP has processes in place to ensure sustainment and deployment of TI along the southwest border and challenges in doing so. GAO reviewed CBP documentation and data and interviewed officials in headquarters and three southwest border locations. These locations were selected based on CBP's extensive investments in TI in such areas.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Border Patrol develop metrics to assess the contributions of pedestrian and vehicle fencing to border security along the southwest border and develop guidance for its process for identifying, funding, and deploying TI assets for border security operations. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-17-331](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

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SOUTHWEST BORDER SECURITY

Additional Actions Needed to Better Assess Fencing's Contributions to Operations and Provide Guidance for Identifying Capability Gaps

What GAO Found

Border fencing is intended to benefit border security operations in various ways, according to officials from the U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol), which is within the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). For example, according to officials, border fencing supports Border Patrol agents' ability to execute essential tasks, such as identifying illicit-cross border activities. CBP collects data that could help provide insight into how border fencing contributes to border security operations, including the location of illegal entries. However, CBP has not developed metrics that systematically use these, among other data it collects, to assess the contributions of border fencing to its mission. For example, CBP could potentially use these data to determine the extent to which border fencing diverts illegal entrants into more rural and remote environments, and border fencing's impact, if any, on apprehension rates over time. Developing metrics to assess the contributions of fencing to border security operations could better position CBP to make resource allocation decisions with the best information available to inform competing mission priorities and investments.

Pedestrian Fencing in San Diego, California, April 2016



Source: GAO. | GAO-17-331

CBP is taking a number of steps to sustain tactical infrastructure (TI) along the southwest border; however, it continues to face certain challenges in maintaining this infrastructure, such as addressing maintenance of roads owned or operated by other public and private entities. In 2014, according to Border Patrol officials, Border Patrol began implementing the Requirements Management Process that is designed to facilitate planning for funding and deploying TI and other requirements. Border Patrol headquarters and sector officials told GAO that Border Patrol lacks adequate guidance for identifying, funding, and deploying TI needs as part of this process. In addition, officials reported experiencing some confusion about their roles and responsibilities in this process. Developing guidance on this process would be consistent with federal internal control standards and would provide more reasonable assurance that the process is consistently followed across Border Patrol. This is a public version of a For Official Use Only—Law Enforcement Sensitive report that GAO issued in December 2016. Information DHS deemed For Official Use Only—Law Enforcement Sensitive has been redacted.