

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-119](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The southwest border has long been vulnerable to cross-border illegal activity. In fiscal year 2016, Border Patrol apprehended over 409,000 illegal entrants. Border Patrol has employed a variety of land-based surveillance technologies to assist in securing the border. GAO has reported regularly on CBP's progress and challenges deploying surveillance technologies.

GAO was asked to review CBP's use of surveillance technology. This report examines (1) the deployment status of surveillance technology programs and the extent to which CBP has developed plans for future technology deployments and (2) what data are available on the contributions of deployed technologies to CBP's border security efforts and the extent to which CBP has assessed technology performance.

GAO analyzed technology program documents; interviewed CBP and Border Patrol officials; and conducted site visits to Arizona and south Texas to observe the operation of various land-based technologies. We selected these locations because CBP has deployed or has plans to deploy a mix of technologies there, among other factors.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Border Patrol issue guidance to improve the quality and usability of its asset assist information. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-18-119](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

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SOUTHWEST BORDER SECURITY

Border Patrol Is Deploying Surveillance Technologies but Needs to Improve Data Quality and Assess Effectiveness

What GAO Found

The U.S. Border Patrol, within the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), has made progress deploying surveillance technology along the southwest U.S. border under its 2011 Arizona Technology Plan (ATP) and 2014 Southwest Border Technology Plan. The ATP called for deployment of a mix of radars, sensors, and cameras in Arizona; the 2014 plan expanded these deployments to the rest of the southwest border. As of October 2017, Border Patrol had completed the planned deployment of select technologies to Arizona, Texas, California, and New Mexico. For example, in Arizona, Border Patrol deployed all planned Remote Video Surveillance Systems (RVSS) and Mobile Surveillance Capability (MSC) systems, and 15 of 53 planned Integrated Fixed Tower (IFT) systems. Border Patrol also deployed all planned MSC systems to Texas, California, and New Mexico and completed contract negotiations to deploy RVSS to Texas. These technology programs have experienced delays, but are currently on track against revised program schedules and cost baselines. To plan for future technology deployments, Border Patrol reports it will use its Requirements Management Process (RMP)—a process designed to facilitate planning by, among other things, identifying capability gaps and collecting agents' feedback—and other initiatives. Border Patrol is currently developing written guidance for the RMP to ensure station officials understand their roles and responsibilities in the process.

Mobile Surveillance Capability System and Integrated Fixed Tower, Arizona



Source: GAO. | GAO-18-119

Border Patrol agents collect and report data on asset assists, which are instances in which technologies or other assets (such as canine teams) contributed to an apprehension or seizure; however, Border Patrol has not provided sufficient guidance to ensure the accuracy and reliability of that data. For example, agents incorrectly attributed some apprehensions or seizures to certain technologies rather than others. Stations in the Rio Grande Valley sector recorded assists from IFTs in about 500 instances from June through December 2016; however, this sector does not have IFTs. Data integrity and quality checks are the responsibility of individual sectors, but Border Patrol has provided limited guidance on how to ensure data quality. Without sufficient guidance to ensure the quality of asset assist data, Border Patrol is limited in its ability to determine the mission benefits of its surveillance technologies and use information on benefits to inform resource allocation decisions.