

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-595T](#), a testimony before the Committee On Homeland Security And Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS has employed a variety of technology, infrastructure, and other assets to help secure the border. For example, in January 2011, CBP developed the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan, which includes seven acquisition programs related to fixed and mobile surveillance systems, agent-portable devices, and ground sensors. CBP has also deployed tactical infrastructure—fencing, roads, and lights—and tactical communications (radio systems) and uses air and marine assets to secure the border. In recent years, GAO has reported on a variety of DHS border security programs and operations.

This statement addresses some of the key issues and recommendations GAO has made in the following areas: (1) DHS's efforts to implement the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan and deploy tactical infrastructure, (2) CBP's and ICE's efforts to modernize radio systems, and (3) OAM mix and placement of assets. This statement is based on prior products GAO issued from September 2009 through April 2015, along with selected updates conducted in April and May 2015 to obtain information from DHS on actions it has taken to address prior GAO recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

In its prior work, GAO made recommendations to DHS to strengthen its management of plans and programs, tactical communications, and mix and placement of OAM assets. DHS generally agreed and plans to address the recommendations. Consequently, GAO is not making any new recommendations in this testimony.

View [GAO-15-595T](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

May 13, 2015

BORDER SECURITY

Progress and Challenges in DHS's Efforts to Implement and Assess Infrastructure and Technology

What GAO Found

GAO reported in March 2014 that U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), had made progress in deploying programs under the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan (the Plan), but that CBP could strengthen its management and assessment of the Plan's programs. Specifically, GAO reported that CBP's schedules and life-cycle cost estimates for the Plan and its three highest-cost programs met some but not all best practices and recommended that CBP ensure that its schedules and estimates more fully address best practices, such as validating its cost estimates with independent estimates. CBP concurred and is taking steps toward addressing GAO's recommendations, such as planning to update cost estimates by the end of calendar year 2015. Further, in March 2014, GAO reported that while CBP had identified mission benefits of technologies to be deployed under the Plan, such as improved situational awareness, the agency had not developed key attributes for performance metrics for all technologies, as GAO recommended. In April 2015, GAO reported that CBP had identified a set of potential key attributes for performance metrics for deployed technologies and CBP officials stated that by the end of fiscal year 2015, baselines for each performance measure will be developed and the agency will begin using the data to evaluate the contributions of specific technology assets.

In March 2015, GAO reported that DHS, CBP, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) had taken steps to upgrade tactical communications equipment and infrastructure, such as completing full modernization projects in four of the nine southwest border sectors, but could benefit by developing performance and program plans. Since rolling out upgrades—which include replacing and updating equipment and expanding infrastructure—CBP had not established an ongoing performance monitoring plan to determine whether the systems were working as intended. CBP agreed to develop such a plan, as GAO recommended, and is working to complete the plan by the end of 2015. Further, GAO reported in March 2015 that ICE did not have a program plan to manage its portfolio of modernization projects. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendation to develop a plan and stated that ICE will develop a program to facilitate, coordinate, and maintain ICE's radio systems, and document resource needs, define program goals, and establish performance measures by January 2016.

In March 2012, GAO reported that the Office of Air and Marine (OAM) within CBP could benefit from reassessing its mix and placement of assets to better address mission needs and threats. GAO reported that OAM should clearly document the linkage of deployment decisions to mission needs and threat and its analysis and assessments used to support its decisions on the mix and placement of assets. GAO also reported that OAM could consider how border technology deployment will affect customer requirements for OAM assets. GAO recommended that CBP reassess the mix and placement of OAM's assets to include mission requirements, among other things. CBP concurred, and after May 2013, OAM began a realignment of personnel, aircraft, and vessels from the northern border to the southern border based on its evaluation of the utilization and efficiency of current assets and available funding to accomplish the transfers. In April 2015, OAM officials stated that they are working to provide GAO with the data and analysis used to support the realignment of assets.