

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-397T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS has employed a variety of technology, tactical infrastructure, and personnel assets to help secure the nearly 2,000 mile long southwest border. Since 2009, GAO has issued over 35 products on the progress and challenges DHS has faced in using technology, infrastructure, and other resources to secure the border. GAO has made over 50 recommendations to help improve DHS's efforts, and DHS has implemented more than half of them.

This statement addresses (1) DHS efforts to deploy and measure the effectiveness of surveillance technologies, (2) DHS efforts to maintain and assess the effectiveness of existing tactical infrastructure and to deploy new physical barriers, and (3) staffing challenges the Border Patrol has faced. This statement is based on three GAO reports issued in 2017, selected updates conducted in 2017, and ongoing work related to DHS acquisitions and the construction of physical barriers. For ongoing work GAO analyzed DHS and CBP documents, interviewed officials within DHS, and visited border areas in California.

What GAO Recommends

In recent reports, GAO made or reiterated recommendations for DHS to, among other things, assess the contributions of technology and fencing to border security. DHS generally agreed, and has actions planned or underway to address these recommendations.

View [GAO-18-397T](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gamblierr@gao.gov.

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BORDER SECURITY

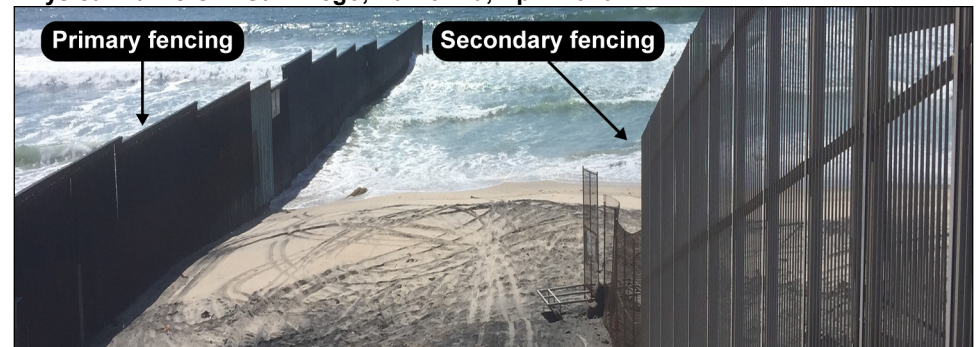
Progress and Challenges with the Use of Technology, Tactical Infrastructure, and Personnel to Secure the Southwest Border

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—a mix of radars, sensors, and cameras—along the southwest U.S. border. As of October 2017, the Border Patrol had completed the planned deployment of select technologies to several states along the southwest border. The Border Patrol has also made progress toward assessing performance of surveillance technologies, but additional actions are needed to fully implement GAO's 2011 and 2014 recommendations in this area. For example, the Border Patrol has not yet used available data to determine the contribution of surveillance technologies to border security efforts.

CBP spent about \$2.3 billion to deploy fencing from fiscal years 2007 through 2015 and constructed 654 miles of fencing by 2015. The Border Patrol has reported that border fencing supports agents' ability to respond to illicit cross-border activities by slowing the progress of illegal entrants. GAO reported in February 2017 that CBP was taking a number of steps in sustaining tactical infrastructure—such as fencing, roads, and lighting—along the southwest border. However, CBP has not developed metrics that systematically use data it collects to assess the contributions of border fencing to its mission, as GAO has recommended. CBP concurred with the recommendation and plans to develop metrics by January 2019. Further, CBP established the Border Wall System Program in response to a January 2017 executive order that called for the immediate construction of a southwest border wall. This program is intended to replace and add to existing barriers along the southwest border. In April 2017, DHS leadership gave CBP approval to procure barrier prototypes, which are intended to help inform new design standards for the border wall system.

Physical Barriers in San Diego, California, April 2016



Source: GAO. | [GAO-18-397T](#)

The Border Patrol has faced challenges in achieving a staffing level of 21,370 agents, the statutorily-established minimum from fiscal years 2011 through 2016. As of September 2017, the Border Patrol reported it had about 19,400 agents. GAO reported in November 2017 that Border Patrol officials cited staffing shortages as a challenge for optimal deployment. As a result, officials had to make decisions about how to prioritize activities for deployment given the number of agents available.