

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-653T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

At the end of fiscal year 2004, DHS had about 28,100 personnel assigned to patrol U.S. land borders and inspect travelers at air, land, and sea POEs, with a total security cost of about \$5.9 billion. At the end of fiscal year 2011, DHS had about 41,400 personnel assigned to air, land, and sea POEs and along the borders, with a total security cost of about \$11.8 billion. DHS has reported that these resources have contributed to stronger enforcement efforts on the border. However, challenges remain to secure the border. In recent years, GAO has reported on a variety of DHS border security programs and operations.

As requested, this statement addresses some of the key issues and recommendations GAO has made in the following areas: (1) DHS's efforts to secure the border at and between POEs; (2) DHS interagency coordination and oversight of border security information sharing and enforcement efforts; and (3) DHS management of infrastructure, technology, and other assets used to secure the border. This statement is based on prior products GAO issued from January 2008 through March 2013, along with selected updates conducted in April 2013. For selected updates, GAO reviewed DHS information on actions it has taken to address prior GAO recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

In prior reports, GAO made recommendations to DHS to strengthen its border security programs and efforts. DHS generally concurred and has taken actions, or has actions planned or underway to address them.

View [GAO-13-653T](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

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BORDER SECURITY

Progress and Challenges in DHS Implementation and Assessment Efforts

What GAO Found

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), has reported progress in stemming illegal cross-border activity, but it could strengthen the assessment of its efforts. For example, since fiscal year 2011, DHS has used the number of apprehensions on the southwest border between ports of entry (POE) as an interim measure for border security. GAO reported in December 2012 that apprehensions decreased across the southwest border from fiscal years 2006 through 2011, generally mirroring a decrease in estimated known illegal entries in each southwest border sector. CBP attributed this decrease in part to changes in the U.S. economy and increased resources for border security. Data reported by CBP's Office of Border Patrol (Border Patrol) show that total apprehensions across the southwest border increased from over 327,000 in fiscal year 2011 to about 357,000 in fiscal year 2012. It is too early to assess whether this increase indicates a change in the trend. GAO testified in February 2013 that the number of apprehensions provides information on activity levels but does not inform program results or resource allocation decisions. Border Patrol is in the process of developing performance goals and measures for assessing the progress of its efforts to secure the border between POEs, but it has not identified milestones and time frames for developing and implementing them, as GAO recommended. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendations and said that it plans to set a date for establishing such milestones and time frames by November 2013.

According to DHS law enforcement partners, interagency coordination and information sharing improved, but challenges remain. GAO reported in November 2010 that information sharing and communication among federal law enforcement officials responsible for federal borderlands had increased; however, gaps remained in ensuring law enforcement officials had access to daily threat information. GAO recommended that relevant federal agencies ensure interagency agreements for coordinating information and integrating border security operations are further implemented. These agencies agreed, and in January 2011, CBP issued a memorandum affirming the importance of federal partnerships to address border security threats on federal lands. While this is a positive step, to fully satisfy the intent of GAO's recommendation, DHS needs to take further action to monitor and uphold implementation of the existing interagency agreements.

Opportunities exist to improve DHS's management of border security assets. For example, DHS conceived the Secure Border Initiative Network as a surveillance technology and deployed such systems along 53 miles of Arizona's border. In January 2011, in response to performance, cost, and schedule concerns, DHS canceled future procurements, and developed the Arizona Border Surveillance Technology Plan (the Plan) for the remainder of the Arizona border. GAO reported in November 2011 that in developing the Plan, CBP conducted an analysis of alternatives, but it had not documented the analysis justifying the specific types, quantities, and deployment locations of technologies proposed in the Plan, which GAO recommended that it do. DHS concurred with this recommendation. GAO has ongoing work in this area, and among other things, is examining DHS's efforts to address prior recommendations, and expects to issue a report in fall 2013.