



Highlights of [GAO-08-1141T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

In November 2005, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) established the Secure Border Initiative (SBI), a multiyear, multibillion-dollar program to secure U.S. borders. One element of SBI is the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) SBI program, which is responsible for developing a comprehensive border protection system through a mix of surveillance and communication technologies known as *SBI<sub>net</sub>* (e.g., radars, sensors, cameras, and satellite phones), and tactical infrastructure (e.g., fencing).

The House Committee on Homeland Security and its Subcommittee on Management, Investigations, and Oversight asked GAO to monitor DHS progress in implementing CBP's SBI program. This testimony provides GAO's observations on (1) technology deployment; (2) infrastructure deployment; and (3) how the CBP SBI program office has defined its human capital goals and the progress it has made to achieve these goals. GAO's observations are based on prior and new work, including analysis of DHS documentation, such as program schedules, contracts, and status reports. GAO also conducted interviews with DHS and Department of the Interior officials and contractors, and visits to sites on the southwest border where SBI deployment is under way. GAO performed the work from March to September 2008. DHS generally agreed with GAO's findings.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1141T](#). For more information, contact Richard M. Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.

## SECURE BORDER INITIATIVE

### Observations on Deployment Challenges

#### What GAO Found

*SBI<sub>net</sub>* technology deployments continue to experience delays and, as a result, Border Patrol agents have to rely upon existing limited technological capabilities to help achieve control of the border. SBI program officials had originally planned to deploy *SBI<sub>net</sub>* technology across the southwest border by the end of 2008, but in February 2008 this date had slipped to 2011. In July 2008, officials reported that two initial projects that had been scheduled to be completed by the end of calendar year 2008 would be finished sometime in 2009. *SBI<sub>net</sub>* program uncertainties, such as not fully defined program expectations, changes to timelines, and confusion over the need to obtain environmental permits contribute to ongoing delays of *SBI<sub>net</sub>* technology deployments. Due to the delays, Border Patrol agents continue to use existing technology that predates *SBI<sub>net</sub>*, and in the Tucson, Arizona, area they are using capabilities from *SBI<sub>net</sub>*'s prototype system despite previously reported performance shortfalls. Further delays of *SBI<sub>net</sub>* technology deployments may hinder the Border Patrol's efforts to secure the border.

The deployment of fencing is ongoing, but costs are increasing, the life-cycle cost is not yet known, and meeting DHS's statutorily required goal to have 670 miles of fencing in place by December 31, 2008, will be challenging. As of August 22, 2008, the SBI program office reported that it had constructed a total of 341 miles of fencing, and program officials stated that they plan to meet the December 2008 deadline. However, project costs are increasing and various factors pose challenges to meeting this deadline, such as a short supply of labor and land acquisition issues. According to program officials, as of August 2008, fencing costs averaged \$7.5 million per mile for pedestrian fencing and \$2.8 million per mile for vehicle fencing, up from estimates in February 2008 of \$4 million and \$2 million per mile, respectively. Furthermore, the life-cycle cost is not yet known, in part because of increasing construction costs and because the program office has yet to determine maintenance costs and locations for fencing projects beyond December 2008. In addition, land acquisition issues present a challenge to completing fence construction.

As of September 2008, the SBI program office was reevaluating its staffing goal and continued to take actions to implement its human capital plan. In February 2008, we reported that the SBI program office had established a staffing goal of 470 employees for fiscal year 2008. As of August 1, 2008, the SBI program office reported having 129 government staff and 164 contractor support staff for a total of 293 employees. Program officials stated that a reorganization of the SBI program office and *SBI<sub>net</sub>* project delays have resulted in fewer staffing needs and that they plan to continue to evaluate these needs. The SBI program office also continued to take steps to implement its human capital plan. For example, recruitment efforts are under way to fill open positions. However, the SBI program office is in the process of drafting or has drafted documents, such as the Succession Management Plan, that have yet to be approved or put into action.