



Highlights of [GAO-08-508T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Management, Investigations, and Oversight, and Border, Maritime and Global Counterterrorism, 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 security infrastructure (e.g., fencing) and surveillance and communication technologies (e.g., radars, sensors, cameras, and satellite phones).

GAO was asked to monitor DHS progress in implementing CBP's SBI program. This testimony provides GAO's observations on (1) technology implementation; (2) the extent to which Border Patrol agents have been trained and are using SBI technology; (3) infrastructure implementation; and (4) 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 analysis of DHS documentation, such as program schedules, contracts, status, and reports. GAO also conducted interviews with DHS officials and contractors, and visits to sites in the southwest border where SBI deployment is under way. GAO performed the work from November 2007 through February 2008. DHS generally agreed with GAO's findings.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-508T](#). For more information, contact Richard M. Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov

SECURE BORDER INITIATIVE

Observations on the Importance of Applying Lessons Learned to Future Projects

What GAO Found

On February 22, 2008, DHS announced final acceptance of Project 28, a \$20.6 million project to secure 28 miles along the southwest border, and is now gathering lessons learned to use in future technology development. The scope of the project, as described in the task order DHS issued to Boeing—the prime contractor DHS selected to acquire, deploy, and sustain systems of technology across the U.S. borders—was to provide a system with the capabilities required to control 28 miles of border in Arizona. CBP officials responsible for the program said that although Project 28 will not be replicated, they have learned lessons from their experience that they plan to integrate into future technology development. CBP has extended its timeline and approach for future projects and does not expect all of the first phase of its next technology project to be completed before the end of calendar year 2011.

Border Patrol agents began using Project 28 technologies in December 2007, and as of January 2008, 312 agents in the area had received updated training. According to Border Patrol agents, while Project 28 is not an optimal system to support their operations, it has provided greater technological capabilities than did their previous equipment. Not all of the Border Patrol agents in the Tucson sector have been trained on Project 28 because the system will be replaced with newer technologies.

Deployment of fencing along the southwest border is on schedule, but meeting CBP's goal to have 370 miles of pedestrian fence and 300 miles of vehicle fence in place by December 31, 2008, will be challenging and total costs are not yet known. As of February 21, 2008, the SBI program office reported that it had constructed 168 miles of pedestrian fence and 135 miles of vehicle fence. CBP officials reported that meeting deadlines has been difficult because of various factors including difficulties in acquiring rights to border lands. Moreover, CBP officials are unable to estimate the total cost of pedestrian and vehicle fencing because they do not yet know the type of terrain where the fencing is to be constructed, the materials to be used, and the cost to acquire the land. As CBP moves forward with construction, it is making modifications based on lessons learned from previous efforts. For example, CBP plans to buy construction items, such as steel, in bulk; use approved fence designs; and contract out the maintenance and repair.

CBP's SBI program office established a staffing goal of 470 employees for fiscal year 2008, made progress toward meeting this goal and published its human capital plan in December 2007; however, it is in the early stages of implementing the plan. As of February 1, 2008, the office reported having a total of 305 employees. SBI program officials said that they believe they will be able to meet their staffing goal of 470 staff by the end of the fiscal year. In December 2007, the SBI office published the first version of its *Strategic Human Capital Management Plan* and is now in the early implementation phase. The plan outlines seven main goals for the office and activities to accomplish those goals, which align with federal government best practices.