



Why This Matters

Illicit cross-border tunnels along the southwest border of the United States represent a significant threat to border security. Tunnels are primarily used to smuggle illegal drugs into the U.S. Criminals also attempt to use cross-border tunnels to smuggle contraband, currency, and weapons.

Locating and eliminating the tunnels is an important part of DHS' effort to disrupt the criminal organizations that engage in cross-border smuggling. Without the technological capability to routinely and accurately identify tunnels, some may go undetected, providing an unchecked means for cross-border smuggling and unlawful entrance into the U.S.

DHS Response

The Department and CBP concurred with three of the recommendations, and did not provide sufficient detail for concurrence or non-concurrence with one recommendation. Smugglers and other cross-border criminal organizations use a wide range of ever-evolving methods to attempt to move their contraband into the United States. In response, CBP has modified its operations to better detect and respond to threats posed by the different types of illicit cross-border tunnels.

DHS stated that it is committed to providing its frontline agents and the officers with the tools they need to effectively achieve their mission of securing America's borders and facilitating the movement of legitimate travel and trade.

For Further Information:

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202)254-4100, or email us at DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov

CBP's Strategy to Address Illicit Cross-Border Tunnels

What We Determined

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) detects and remediates cross-border tunnels as part of its overall border security mission. However, it currently does not have the technological capability to routinely and accurately detect tunnels. Consequently, criminals may continue to build cross-border tunnels undetected. CBP has stated that it can best address this capability gap through the acquisition of tunnel detection technology.

Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), a directorate of Immigration Customs Enforcement, also has tunnel-related responsibilities. HSI locates tunnels using intelligence derived from its criminal investigations, and assists in the prosecution of the criminals involved.

CBP is creating a program to address tunnel-related capability gaps, including the need for effective tunnel detection technology. To ensure that it does not hinder HSI's investigative efforts, the program must address the mission needs of both HSI and CBP. However, the program has not matured to a point where it demonstrates how it will do so. Additionally, DHS has ultimate responsibility for approving CBP's acquisition program, as well as allocating resources and making decisions to counter the tunnel threat. Therefore, it must ensure that the program addresses both components' needs.

What We Recommend

The Chief, Office of Border Patrol:

- 1) Conduct the planned study of how CBP can address tunnel detection capabilities through existing processes and procedures in support of the Analysis of Alternatives for the Tunnel Detection and Technology Program.
- 2) Complete the planned Concept of Operations document describing how the identified capabilities need to function from a cross-component perspective to support the Analysis of Alternatives for the Tunnel Detection and Technology Program.

Deputy Under Secretary for Management:

- 3) Provide oversight to ensure that CBP identifies and considers key operational dependencies, relationships, and corresponding program risks for CBP's Tunnel Detection and Technology Program efforts prior to approving the program.
- 4) Designate an authority to provide leadership and strategy for, and coordinate, the DHS counter-tunnel efforts. This authority should have the information and ability to make strategic decisions on counter-tunnel policies and procedures across DHS components.