



Highlights of [GAO-09-896](#), a report to congressional requesters

### Why GAO Did This Study

Securing the nation's borders from illegal entry of aliens and contraband, including terrorists and weapons of mass destruction, continues to be a major challenge. In November 2005, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) announced the launch of the Secure Border Initiative (SBI), a multiyear, multibillion dollar program aimed at securing U.S. borders and reducing illegal immigration. Within DHS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) SBI program is responsible for developing a comprehensive border protection system using technology, known as *SBinet*, and tactical infrastructure—fencing, roads, and lighting. GAO was asked to provide periodic updates on the status of the program. This report addresses (1) the extent to which CBP has implemented *SBinet* and the impact of delays that have occurred, and (2) the extent to which CBP has deployed tactical infrastructure and assessed its results. To do this work, GAO reviewed program schedules, status reports, and previous GAO work; interviewed DHS and CBP officials, among others; and visited three SBI sites where initial technology or fencing had been deployed at the time of GAO's review.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Commissioner of CBP conduct a cost-effective evaluation of the impact of the tactical infrastructure's contribution to border security. DHS agreed with this recommendation.

[View GAO-09-896](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Richard Stana at (202) 512-8777 or [stanar@gao.gov](mailto:stanar@gao.gov).

## SECURE BORDER INITIATIVE

### Technology Deployment Delays Persist and the Impact of Border Fencing Has Not Been Assessed

#### What GAO Found

*SBinet* technology capabilities have not yet been deployed and delays require Border Patrol, a CBP component, to rely on existing technology for securing the border, rather than using newer technology planned to overcome the existing technology's limitations. Flaws found in testing and concerns about the impact of placing towers and access roads in environmentally sensitive locations caused delays. As of September 2006, *SBinet* technology deployment for the southwest border was planned to be complete by early fiscal year 2009. When last reported in February 2009, the completion date had slipped to 2016. As a result of such delays, Border Patrol agents continue to use existing technology that has limitations, such as performance shortfalls and maintenance issues. For example, on the southwest border, Border Patrol relies on existing equipment such as cameras mounted on towers that have intermittent problems, including signal loss. Border Patrol has procured and delivered some new technology to fill gaps or augment existing equipment. However, incorporating *SBinet* technology as soon as it is operationally available should better position CBP to identify and implement operational changes needed for securing the border.

Tactical infrastructure deployments are almost complete, but their impact on border security has not been measured. As of June 2009, CBP had completed 633 of the 661 miles of fencing it committed to deploy along the southwest border. However, delays continue due mainly to challenges in acquiring the necessary property rights from landowners. While fencing costs increased over the course of construction, because all construction contracts have been awarded, costs are less likely to change. CBP plans to use \$110 million in fiscal year 2009 funds to build 10 more miles of fencing, and fiscal year 2010 and 2011 funds for supporting infrastructure. CBP reported that tactical infrastructure, coupled with additional trained agents, had increased the miles of the southwest border under control, but despite a \$2.4 billion investment, it cannot account separately for the impact of tactical infrastructure. CBP measures miles of tactical infrastructure constructed and has completed analyses intended to show where fencing is more appropriate than other alternatives, such as more personnel, but these analyses were based primarily on the judgment of senior Border Patrol agents. Leading practices suggest that a program evaluation would complement those efforts. Until CBP determines the contribution of tactical infrastructure to border security, it is not positioned to address the impact of this investment.

**Tactical Infrastructure Deployment Progress as of June 26, 2009**

Infrastructure type	Miles in place before SBI	Miles		Target	Miles remaining to meet target
		deployed through SBI as of 6/26/09	Total miles in place as of 6/26/09		
Pedestrian fencing	67	264	331	358	27
Vehicle fencing	76	226	302	303	1
<b>Total fencing</b>	<b>143</b>	<b>490</b>	<b>633</b>	<b>661</b>	<b>28</b>

Source: GAO analysis of SBI data.