CBP's Autonomous Surveillance Towers Declared a Program of Record along the Southwest Border

cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-s-autonomous-surveillance-towers-declared-program-record-along

WASHINGTON – U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) today announced that the Autonomous Surveillance Towers (AST) system has become a Program of Record for U.S. Border Patrol (USBP). Autonomous surveillance towers, known formerly as Innovative Towers, operate off-grid with 100 percent renewable energy and provide autonomous surveillance operations 24 hours per day, 365 days per year.

Perfectly suited for remote and rural locations, the AST scans the environment with radar to detect movement, orients a camera to the location of the movement detected by the radar, and analyzes the imagery using algorithms to autonomously identify items of interest, such as people or vehicles. Border Patrol agents are then alerted to this event and have the opportunity to make the final determination on what the item is and if it poses a threat.

These innovative towers operate completely off grid using 100 percent renewable energy, have a small geographic footprint, and minimize the impact to land owners and public lands to the maximum extent. CBP personnel are able to re-locate a tower within two hours, providing frontline agents with a highly flexible, autonomous system that enhances situational awareness, agent effectiveness, and safety.

"These towers give agents in the field a significant leg up against the criminal networks that facilitate illegal cross-border activity," said Border Patrol Chief Rodney Scott. "The more our agents know about what they encounter in the field, the more safely and effectively they can respond."

CBP first piloted the towers in early 2018 with four towers in the San Diego Border Patrol Sector, and has since procured 56 additional towers. CBP is on a path to procure and deploy 140 additional towers in Fiscal Years 2021 and 2022, to reach a total of 200 towers.

Autonomous technology is a true force multiplier for CBP, enabling Border Patrol agents to remain focused on their interdiction mission rather than operating surveillance systems. Investments in autonomous operation, artificial intelligence, and other advanced technologies native to the Autonomous Surveillance Towers are absolutely essential to border security and compliment other capabilities such as the Border Wall System, Remote Video Surveillance System, Integrated Fixed Towers, Mobile Surveillance and small drones.