UA testing invisible border security system

Posted:
Tuesday, December 14, 2010 7:41 PM EST
Updated:
Tuesday, December 28, 2010 9:55 AM EST

By Ana Campos – email

TUCSON, AZ (KOLD) – New technology coming out of Tucson could potentially do what the virtual fence at the border failed to do above ground.

It's an underground monitoring system that the UA's Lowell Institute for Mineral Resources is backing up in a new report.

The technology uses fiber optic cables which are buried 18 inches underground. The cables are hooked up to a system called Helios, a distributed acoustic sensor.

When someone walks within 100 yards from the underground cable, sound waves are detected.

"The application is to be able to monitor long chunks of border in a non intrusive, non-detectable way," said Scott Urquhart, Senior Geophysicist for the Engineering and Research Organization, ZONGE.

ZONGE is taking FOtech's Helios system which is used to monitor cracks in dams, bridges and highways and applying it for the first time as a border enforcement method.

The UA just released a report highlighting the system's effectiveness in determining the difference between wildlife sound waves and human footsteps. Researchers also agreed it could be a useful tool in conjunction with other enforcement strategies.

The next step according to Urquhart, is getting federal agencies interested in the technology.

One of the advantages he says is that the surveillance system is cheaper than the SBI-Net or virtual fence at the border. Although he didn't specify how much the technology could end up costing, he did speculate it could be about a fifth to a tenth per mile of what it cost to build the border fence.

UA Researchers say a more extensive study at the border is needed. ZONGE is seeking the funds to do just that.