

Congressmen visit Spicewood tech company

Lawmakers note border applications of electromagnetic pulse equipment.

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Two members of Texas' congressional delegation on Tuesday toured a technology company that is developing a system that could be used for border security.

U.S. Reps. Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo , and Michael McCaul, R-Austin , said the technology in development at Applied Physical Electronics could stop smugglers in their tracks by shutting down vehicles' electrical systems. Some workers likened the device to an electronic weapon.

The equipment is being developed in several sizes. Engineers are working on a handheld device that would be used at a very close range. There are also more powerful versions that could be mounted on boats, automobiles and aircraft and be used from a hundred or more yards away.

The Department of Defense already has been testing the Spicewood company's gear, which works by sending crippling electromagnetic pulses that disable electrical systems, the company said.

"We ought to be using the same technology on the border," McCaul said.

Cuellar added: "This is cutting-edge technology to meet the spectrum of 21st-century threats facing our borders and ports of entry."

McCaul and Cuellar — both of whom serve on the Committee on Homeland Security's Subcommittee on Border, Maritime and Global Counterterrorism — said the system could be an effective tool for border agents to stop the boats, cars and other vehicles used by drug smugglers and human traffickers.

The company said some of its equipment is available today, but other gear could be ready for domestic use within the next several months.

Located on a nondescript lot off Texas 71, Applied Physical Electronics was founded in 1998 and has 16 employees. Its annual revenue is about \$3 million a year, the company said. In addition to developing security devices, the company also is working on countermeasures against similar electronic weapons that other countries are developing.

At a news conference, Cuellar and McCaul said the company's equipment would complement other technology, such as unmanned aircraft, already in use on the border.

McCaul said he and Cuellar are planning to introduce a bill in the coming weeks that would add more unmanned surveillance planes along the country's southwest border.

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