



New Temporary Facilities in Texas and Arizona Expand CBP Holding Capacity

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U.S. Customs and Borders Protection (CBP) personnel are working to process an unprecedented number of migrants arriving along the Southwest Border. The volume is placing CBP processing centers, designed to accommodate short term stays of 72 hours or less, under severe strain. Between May and August 2019 the agency worked diligently to increase its holding capacity by 6,500 people, standing up six temporary steel-framed structures to address the ongoing need for space to accommodate the influx of families and single adults entering the U.S. from Mexico.

The newest facility, located in Donna, Texas, opened Monday, and an additional facility in Tornillo, Texas, will open on Friday. Together, these two structures can hold up to 4,500 single adults. All of the new facilities are weatherproof, climate-controlled spaces that include a variety of services to accommodate the needs of incoming migrants.

“The additional capacity of these critical structures provides much needed help during the crisis. Unfortunately, we are filling these facilities as soon as they are constructed,” said Border Patrol Division Chief Lloyd Easterling, who is responsible for the temporary facility in Donna, Texas. CBP stood the facility up in May and expanded it in June 2019, doubling the structure’s size and holding space. The agency also opened a new facility in Yuma, Arizona in June.

Within two days, the facilities in Donna and Yuma, designed to hold 500 people each, were at capacity as the number of incoming migrants continued to surge. In some locations, the volume of apprehensions between 2018 and 2019 increased by over 300 percent.

To CBP employees, the individuals initially responsible when migrants first enter the United States, the effort to provide a proper solution to the current crisis means much more than an increase in space and numbers. “This project is very different from other projects in that we are providing a humane solution to families, unaccompanied children and adults during this crisis. We are providing all the essential services and products within a record amount of time. We have worked through vacation and family time to ensure

the temporary facilities are operational as soon as possible,” said Rosie Zaragoza-Santos, a contracting specialist who works with the CBP office responsible for the timely procurement and delivery of the supplies and services provided within each temporary structure. Services provided include hot meals and snacks, hygiene kits, medical services, transportation, sleeping mats, blankets, drinking water, diapers, wipes, baby formula and clothing sets.

Employees across the agency are working overtime and sacrificing family and personal time to dedicate their efforts to standing up the additional spaces and to ensure that incoming family units have a suitable place to be processed and to await transfer out of CBP custody.

“The stakes are enormously high. As people, as parents, we want to do whatever we can to

help,” explained Jeannine Hamilton who helps to oversee the background investigation process for every CBP employee and contractor working within CBP facilities, including the temporary structures.

Following the initial deployments of soft-sided facilities in El Paso and Donna, Texas in May, Hamilton and Zaragoza-Santos’ teams partnered with CBP’s Office of Facilities and Asset Management to open the two additional facilities in Donna and Yuma, expanding CBP’s holding capacity to accommodate 1,000 more people in just over a month.

“We’ve been able to stand these facilities up in about a three to four week period, and we’ve been working around the clock to ensure that solutions are developed and in place to support the current crisis,” said a Senior Communications Specialist with the Office of Facilities and Asset Management, the CBP office that is ultimately responsible for the stand up of these facilities.

“We are trying to address the humanitarian effort by issuing contracts that provide clean clothing, housing, food, medical care and showers for incoming migrants, while also supporting our agents at the frontline,” said Zaragoza-Santos.

Additional safety features like security guards, weather proofing, and cameras also keep migrants and agents secure while providing respite from the escalating summer temperatures along the border.

“In Yuma last week the temperature coming off the pavement was over 150 degrees” reported the Office of Facilities and Asset Management’s communications team, emphasizing the importance of the Yuma structure, which opened on June 29. The facility in Arizona is providing relief to a region that experienced a



The new temporary structure in Yuma, Arizona was designed to hold up to 500 detainees. The climate controlled facility keeps migrants and agents comfortable while the summer sun scorches outside. Photo taken by U.S. Border Patrol drone.

350 percent increase in apprehensions between May 2018 and May 2019, apprehending 14,000 migrants in a single month. The new climate controlled facility keeps migrants and agents comfortable while the summer sun scorches outside.



The temporary facility built to hold 2,500 single adults in Tornillo, Texas, is scheduled to open Friday.

Zaragoza-Santos, Hamilton, and Easterling represent just a few members of the CBP team that are working hard to respond to the overwhelming demands along the border, especially as the agency expands its holding capacity by an additional 4,500 by Friday.

Even as the newest facilities open, CBP has plans on the horizon for

more permanent modular solutions along the border, including new sites in El Paso, Texas, and Yuma, Arizona, creating space for incoming family units by increasing capacity by 1,800 people. The agency will also renovate an existing facility in McAllen, Texas, to ensure it is equipped to support Border Patrol agents and incoming migrants with all of the resources and services provided in the newest structures.

“The Southwest Border crisis is on a scale that is unprecedented. The volume and scope is unlike anything we’ve seen before, and it keeps getting bigger.” Hamilton said.

“It breaks my heart as someone who works here and sees how hard our folks work. It's like trying to fill a bathtub one thimble at a time,” she said. “At some point those thimbles will add up. If we can do our part, and we can all do this together, we will make a difference. It may not appear to be a big one, but it's going to be big to someone.”

U.S. Customs and Border Protection is the unified border agency within the Department of Homeland Security charged with the management, control and protection of our nation's borders at and between official ports of entry. CBP is charged with securing the borders of the United States while enforcing hundreds of laws and facilitating lawful trade and travel.

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Tags: Border Security

