

“Build the Wall!”

Close to Otay Mesa Port of Entry near San Diego, CA sits eight completed border wall prototypes. The structures were completed on Oct. 27, the deadline given by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The project began with the executive order, Border Security and Immigrant enforcement Improvements, signed by the President on Jan. 25, 2017. The order states, “the [Department of Homeland Security] Secretary shall take steps to immediately plan, design and construct a physical wall along the southern border, using appropriate materials and technology to most effectively achieve complete operation control of the southern border.”

CBP officials claim the process for the prototype project went off without a hitch but according to emails obtained by USA Today, that is not exactly the case. Problems have plagued the project since the time of the original posting of the solicitation. The CBP first posted, and then within an hour, removed the initial solicitation from their website, leading to confusion among the projects interested bidders. The posting was replaced with a perplexing message reading, “FBO is having problems with uploads – This solicitation will be posted as soon as the issues are resolved.” A few hours later, the CBO posted three new solicitations, two identical postings for a concrete border wall design and one for a non-concrete designs. The new postings and the 12-day deadline lead to over 200 emails between construction companies and the CBP.

Emails show that companies were confused, and wondering which of the two identical postings, were they supposed to respond to for the concrete border structures. Emails also show confusion on the deadline for the bids. The solicitation stated, “Phase I Response Date: Responses to Phase 1 – Concept Papers/Qualifications Statements shall be received no later than 4 PM on March 29, 2017.” Bidders were unsure under which time zone the 4 PM deadline fell. Other emails contained question on page limits, requests for extensions, and requests for answers to previously submitted emails.

After adding seven amendments to the solicitation and extending the deadline by one week, CBP chose six companies to build the eight prototypes. Some experts believe that the rushed process left some qualified companies on the wrong side of the wall. Patrick Malyszek, who runs a consulting firm for government contractors says the chaos surrounding the border wall solicitations, “shows the government still doesn’t know what they want, is still developing specifications and spending a great deal of money trying to figure out what they want.” At least one company plans to sue the government over the project and more companies are considering the possibility.

Now that the prototypes are complete they will undergo testing for 30-60 days to see their anti-breaching capabilities, anti-climbing capabilities, anti-digging capabilities, impedance and denial to traffic, and if the walls are safe for Border Patrol agents. Problems with the prototype process is not the only issue facing the completion of the border wall. Perhaps the biggest hurdle the President is facing is funding the 2,000-mile completed wall with an estimated price tag of \$8-\$12 billion dollars. This leaves many wondering if the U.S. will end up with a “big, beautiful wall” or a big waste of taxpayer’s money.