


GAO
 Accountability • Integrity • Reliability
Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-285T](#), a report to the Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Commercial aviation has been a long-standing target for terrorists. Since the tragic attacks of September 11, 2001, substantial changes have been made to enhance security—including the creation of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the federalization of the passenger screener workforce. However, despite these changes, vulnerabilities in aviation security continue to exist. Accordingly, GAO was asked to describe TSA's efforts to (1) measure the effectiveness of its aviation security initiatives, (2) strengthen its passenger screening program, and (3) address additional challenges in further enhancing aviation security.

What GAO Recommends

In prior reports and testimonies, GAO has made numerous recommendations to strengthen aviation security. We also have ongoing reviews assessing many of the issues addressed in this testimony and will issue separate reports on these areas at a later date.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-285T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cathleen A. Berrick at (202) 512-8777 or Berrickc@gao.gov.

AVIATION SECURITY

Efforts to Measure Effectiveness and Strengthen Security Programs

What GAO Found

TSA has implemented numerous initiatives designed to enhance aviation security, but has collected limited information on the effectiveness of these initiatives in protecting commercial aircraft. Our recent work on passenger screening found that little testing or other data exist that measures the performance of screeners in detecting threat objects. However, TSA is taking steps to collect additional data, including developing a 5-year performance plan detailing numerous performance measures, as well as fielding the Threat Image Projection system and increasing screener testing.

In addition to collecting performance data, TSA could further strengthen passenger screening by fully deploying recurrent and supervisory training programs, determining the appropriate levels of screeners at the nation's airports, and improving oversight of the contract screener pilot program. Although TSA has developed and deployed basic and remedial training programs, it has not fully developed or deployed recurrent or supervisory training programs. In addition, TSA acknowledged that its initial staffing efforts created imbalances at the nation's airports, and that it has taken limited action to assess the performance of the pilot airports using private, versus federal, screeners. TSA is undertaking a number of actions to address these concerns, including strengthening its training program and awarding contracts to assess its staffing model and the performance of the contract pilot airports.

TSA faces a number of other challenges as it continues to enhance aviation security. Significant challenges include implementing the Computer-Assisted Passenger Prescreening System (CAPPS II), as well as strengthening baggage screening, airport perimeter and access controls, and air cargo and general aviation security. In implementing CAPPS II, TSA must ensure it addresses concerns surrounding travelers' privacy rights, the accuracy of databases used by CAPPS II, and obtaining international cooperation needed for the system to be fully operational. Additional challenges include integrating explosive detection systems into airport's in-line baggage handling systems, identifying cost-effective perimeter security technologies, effectively targeting air cargo for screening, and improving security at general aviation airports. Further, TSA faces challenges in funding increased aviation security measures and ensuring that these costs are controlled.

Security Screeners Checking Passengers with a Hand-Held Metal Detector



Source: FAA.