June 24, 2014

EXPLOSIVES DETECTION CANINES

TSA Has Taken Steps to Analyze Canine Team Data and Assess the Effectiveness of Passenger Screening Canines

Why GAO Did This Study

TSA has implemented a multilayered system composed of people, processes, and technology to protect the nation's transportation system. One of TSA's security layers is NEDCTP, composed of over 800 deployed explosives detection canine teams, including PSC teams trained to detect explosives on passengers.

This testimony addresses the extent to which TSA has (1) regularly analyzed data to identify program trends and areas working well or in need of corrective action, and (2) comprehensively assessed the effectiveness of PSCs, and coordinated with stakeholders to deploy PSC teams to the highest-risk airports and utilize them as intended. This statement is based on a report GAO issued in January 2013 and selected updates obtained from October 2013 through June 2014. For the selected updates, GAO reviewed TSA documentation, including the results of PSC effectiveness assessments, and interviewed agency officials on the status of implementing GAO's recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making no new recommendations in this statement.

What GAO Found

In January 2013, GAO reported that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) collected and used key canine program data in support of its National Explosives Detection Canine Team Program (NEDCTP), but could better analyze these data to identify program trends. For example, GAO found that in reviewing short notice assessments (covert tests), TSA did not analyze the results beyond the pass and fail rates. Therefore, TSA was missing an opportunity to determine if there were any search areas or types of explosives in which canine teams were more effective compared with others, and what, if any, training may be needed to mitigate deficiencies. GAO recommended that TSA regularly analyze available data to identify program trends and areas that are working well and those in need of corrective action to guide program resources and activities. TSA concurred and has taken actions that address the intent of our recommendation. For example, in the event a team fails a short notice assessment, TSA now requires that canine team supervisors complete an analysis of the team's training records to identify an explanation for the failure.

In January 2013, GAO found that TSA began deploying passenger screening canine (PSC) teams—teams of canines trained to detect explosives being carried or worn on a person—in April 2011 prior to determining the teams' operational effectiveness and where within an airport PSC teams would be most effectively utilized. GAO recommended that TSA expand and complete testing to assess the effectiveness of PSCs and conventional canines (trained to detect explosives in stationary objects) in all airport areas deemed appropriate prior to making additional PSC deployments. This would help (1) determine whether PSCs are effective at screening passengers, and resource expenditures for PSC training are warranted, and (2) inform decisions regarding the type of canine team to deploy and where to optimally deploy such teams. TSA concurred and has taken steps to address the recommendation, but additional action is needed. Specifically, TSA launched a PSC training and assessment initiative and determined PSCs to be most effective when working at the airport checkpoint, but TSA does not plan to conduct a comparison of PSC teams with conventional canine teams as GAO recommended. In January 2013, GAO also found that TSA's 2012 Strategic Framework calls for the deployment of PSC teams based on risk; however, airport stakeholder concerns related to the composition and capabilities of PSC teams resulted in the teams not being deployed to the highest-risk airports. GAO recommended that if PSCs are determined to provide an enhanced security benefit compared with conventional canine teams, TSA should coordinate with airport stakeholders to deploy future PSC teams to the highest-risk airports. TSA concurred and has taken steps to address the recommendation. Specifically, the PSC teams for which TSA had funding and not already deployed to a specific airport at the time GAO's report was issued have been deployed to, or allocated to, the highest-risk airports.

_____ **United States Government Accountability Office**