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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-10-183T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security, Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), whose reauthorization is the subject of today's hearing, plays a vital role in advancing transportation safety by investigating accidents, determining their causes, issuing safety recommendations, and conducting safety studies. To support the agency's mission, NTSB's Training Center provides training to NTSB investigators and others. From 2006 through 2008, GAO made 21 recommendations to NTSB that address management, information technology (IT), accident investigation criteria, safety studies, and Training Center use. This testimony addresses NTSB's progress in implementing recommendations that it (1) follow leading management practices, (2) conduct aspects of its accident investigations and safety studies more efficiently, and (3) increase the use of its Training Center.

This testimony is based on GAO's assessment from July 2009 to October 2009 of plans and procedures NTSB developed to address these recommendations. NTSB provided technical comments that GAO incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-10-183T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham, Ph.D., at (202) 512-2834 or [dillingham@gao.gov](mailto:dillingham@gao.gov).

## NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

### Reauthorization Provides an Opportunity to Focus on Implementing Leading Management Practices and Addressing Human Capital and Training Center Issues

#### What GAO Found

NTSB has fully implemented or made significant progress in adopting leading management practices in all areas in which GAO made prior recommendations. For example, as GAO recommended in 2006, NTSB issued agencywide plans for human capital management and IT management, as well as a strategic plan. In 2008, GAO identified opportunities for improvement in those plans, and NTSB has since issued revised human capital and IT plans and drafted a revised agencywide strategic plan and a new strategic training plan. NTSB has taken steps to improve its diversity management. However, the percentages of NTSB's fiscal year 2008 workforce that were women and minorities were lower than those of the federal government. In addition, no members of a minority group are part of NTSB's 15-member career Senior Executive Service. Since GAO's 2008 report, NTSB has continued to improve information security by installing encryption software on agency laptops and appropriately restricting users' access privileges. NTSB has obligated money to implement a full cost accounting system consistent with a prior GAO recommendation, but NTSB officials said that the system will not be implemented until late in fiscal year 2010.

In 2008, GAO reported that NTSB had made significant progress in articulating risk-based criteria for selecting which accidents to investigate. Specifically, NTSB had established such criteria for identifying which rail, pipeline, hazardous materials, and aviation accidents to investigate at the scene. Since then, NTSB has adopted the remaining highway and marine criteria, and NTSB is streamlining and increasing its use of technology in closing-out recommendations. NTSB has three safety studies in progress and would like to broaden the term "safety studies" to include not only its current studies of multiple accidents, but also the research it does for other smaller safety-related reports and data inquiries.

NTSB has continued to increase the use of its Training Center—from 10 percent in fiscal year 2006 to 80 percent in fiscal year 2009. As a result, revenues have increased and the center's overall deficit has declined from about \$3.9 million in fiscal year 2005 to about \$1.9 million in fiscal year 2009.

#### NTSB Training Center



Source: NTSB.