Office of Special Investigations

The Office of Special Investigations (OSI) is a specialized unit within GAO created to meet the Congress' need for focused, quick responses to questions and issues of criminal activity, fraud, and abuse. Staffed with senior criminal investigators, its primary mission is to identify and investigate potential fraud, criminal misconduct, and serious wrongdoing involving federal funds, programs, and activities.

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Description of *our work*

OSI assists the Congress in its oversight role through investigative work in areas as varied as Medicaid program abuses, money laundering schemes, and military justice. By identifying examples of fraud and abuse, we can help illustrate program weaknesses, demonstrate systemic problems, and support findings and recommendations in GAO work. During an audit, GAO analysts from other teams may find indicators that point to fraud or other wrongdoing. Analysts then refer these findings to OSI for preliminary investigation. Depending on our preliminary assessment of the findings, we will (1) develop a case-specific example to include in GAO's report to the Congress, (2) refer the matter to the appropriate executive branch agency for further investigation, or (3) determine that no basis for further investigation exists.

We also conduct independent investigations and work proactively to identify potential weaknesses that allow federal laws and regulations, such as Federal Communications Commission rules or federal firearms laws, to be circumvented. By testing suspected weaknesses, we can bring regulatory or operational flaws to the attention of the Congress and the executive branch before those weaknesses are exploited.

We also manage the GAO FraudNET, a hotline through which the public can report allegations of fraud and abuse on-line, by mail, or telephone. Our analysts evaluate allegations of abuse, which are either referred directly to the appropriate agency or investigated by one of our special agents.

IMPACT OF *our work*

Whether through investigations requested by the Congress, support for GAO audits, or its own independent work, OSI has demonstrated in real terms the effect of waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement on federal programs. For example, we have worked with GAO analysts to account for millions of dollars of military materiel previously unaccounted for. Recently, one of our proactive investigations targeted security and public safety at federal buildings and airports and identified important security weaknesses. The Congress used this information in enacting the Enhanced Federal Security Act of 2000, making it a federal crime to enter, or attempt to enter, federal property or the secure area of an airport under false pretenses.

HIGHLIGHTS OF RECENT and *future projects*

The direction of our future investigative work depends largely on (1) emerging issues at greatest risk for criminal exploitation, (2) the Congress' oversight interest, and (3) GAO's strategic priorities. In the coming year, we will focus on health care financing abuses, money laundering, and Defense inventory management.