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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-533T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Surface Transportation, and Merchant Marine Infrastructure, Safety and Security, Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is responsible for preventing weapons of mass destruction from entering the United States in cargo containers that are shipped from more than 700 foreign seaports. The Security and Accountability for Every (SAFE) Port Act calls for testing the feasibility of scanning 100 percent of U.S.-bound cargo containers, and the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act (9/11 Act) requires scanning 100 percent of U.S.-bound cargo containers by 2012. To fulfill these requirements, CBP created the Secure Freight Initiative (SFI) and has initiated a pilot program at seven seaports. This testimony discusses challenges related to the SFI pilot program and implementation of the requirement to scan 100 percent of U.S.-bound container cargo. This testimony is based on GAO products issued from July 2003 through April 2008 and ongoing work. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed reports from CBP and international partners on SFI and other container security programs, and interviewed CBP and foreign customs officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommended in prior reports that DHS develop human capital plans, enhance performance measures, and gather information on the efficacy of host government systems. DHS generally concurred with our recommendations and is taking steps to address them.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-533T](#). For more information, contact Stephen Caldwell at (202) 512-9610 or caldwells@gao.gov.

SUPPLY CHAIN SECURITY

Challenges to Scanning 100 Percent of U.S.-Bound Cargo Containers

What GAO Found

GAO identified challenges in nine areas that are related to the continuation of the SFI pilot program and the longer-term 100 percent scanning requirement:

- **Workforce planning:** The SFI pilot program could generate an increased quantity of scan data. Therefore, more CBP officers will be required to review and analyze data for participating seaports.
- **Host nation examination practices:** The SAFE Port and 9/11 Acts require DHS to develop standards for the scanning systems, but CBP lacks information on host nation equipment and practices.
- **Measuring performance:** CBP has had difficulties defining performance measures for its container security programs; therefore, it will be difficult to assess if 100 percent scanning achieves increased security.
- **Resource responsibilities:** Neither the SAFE Port Act nor the 9/11 Act specifies whether the United States would bear the costs of implementing 100 percent scanning.
- **Logistics:** Space constraints can require seaports to place scanning equipment miles from where cargo containers are stored, and some containers are only available for scanning for a short period of time and may be difficult to access.
- **Technology and infrastructure:** Environmental conditions can damage equipment and cause delays, and infrastructure capacity and equipment compatibility have presented difficulties in the SFI pilot program.
- **Use and ownership of data:** Legislation specifies that scan data should be available to CBP officials, but the data are often generated and collected by foreign seaports and, in some cases, will require international agreements for transfer to CBP officials.
- **Consistency with risk management:** International partners state that 100 percent scanning is inconsistent with accepted risk management principles and diverts resources away from other security threats.
- **Reciprocity and trade concerns:** Foreign governments could call for reciprocity of 100 percent scanning, requiring the United States to scan cargo containers, and some view this requirement as a barrier to trade.

Congested Conditions at Ports Present Challenges to 100 Percent Scanning of Containers



Source: GAO.