PORT SECURITY

Better Planning Needed to Develop and Operate Maritime Worker Identification Card Program

What GAO Found

Three main factors, all of which resulted in delays for testing a prototype of the maritime worker identification card system, caused the agency to miss its initial August 2004 target date for issuing the cards: (1) officials had difficulty obtaining timely approval to proceed with the prototype test from DHS, (2) extra time was required to identify data to be collected for a cost-benefit analysis, and (3) additional work to assess card technologies was required. DHS has not determined when it may begin issuing cards.

In the future, TSA will face difficult challenges as it moves forward with developing and operating the card program, for example, developing regulations that identify eligibility requirements for the card. An additional challenge—and one that holds potential to adversely affect the entire program—is that TSA does not yet have a comprehensive plan in place for managing the project. Failure to develop such a plan places the card program at higher risk of cost overruns, missed deadlines, and underperformance. Following established, industry best practices for project planning and management could help TSA address these challenges. Best practices suggest managers develop a comprehensive project plan and other, detailed component plans. However, while TSA has initiated some project planning, the agency lacks an approved comprehensive project plan to govern the life of the project and has not yet developed other, detailed component plans for risk mitigation or the cost-benefit and alternatives analyses.

How a Biometric Card Could Help Control Access

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TSA’s identification management system

Local facility database

Data shared on

- Valid cards
- “Hotlisted” cards
- Workers denied access by local ports

Secure area

Worker biometric information matched to card

Checkpoint communicates with local facility database

- Verifies card is valid
- Verifies worker has permission to access secure area

Access denied to worker

Access allowed to worker

Source: GAO analysis of TSA and state of Florida data.

*Cards that are no longer valid due to new threat information or because they are lost, stolen, or damaged.