

Highlights of GAO-13-239, a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

TSA has implemented a multilayered system composed of people, processes, and technology to protect the transportation system. One of TSA's security layers is NCP, composed of over 760 deployed explosives detection canine teams, including PSC teams trained to detect explosives on passengers. As requested, GAO examined (1) data TSA has on its canine program, what these data show, and to what extent TSA analyzed these data to identify program trends, and (2) the extent to which TSA deployed PSC teams using a risk-based approach and determined their effectiveness prior to deployment. To address these questions, GAO conducted visits to four geographic locations selected based on the number and type of canine teams deployed. The results of these site visits are not generalizable, but provided insights into NCP. GAO also analyzed TSA data from 2011 through 2012, such as utilization data; reviewed documents, including response protocols; and interviewed DHS officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that TSA (1) regularly analyze data to identify program trends and areas working well or in need of corrective action, and (2) take actions to comprehensively assess the effectiveness of PSCs. If PSCs are determined to be effective, GAO is recommending that TSA coordinate with stakeholders to deploy PSC teams to the highest-risk airport locations and utilize them as intended. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View videos of GAO's June 2012 observation of PSC teams. [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#).

View [GAO-13-239](#). For more information, contact Stephen Lord at (202) 512-4379 or [lords@gao.gov](mailto:lords@gao.gov).

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# TSA EXPLOSIVES DETECTION CANINE PROGRAM

## Actions Needed to Analyze Data and Ensure Canine Teams Are Effectively Utilized

### What GAO Found

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA), the federal agency that administers the National Canine Program (NCP), is collecting and using key data on its canine program, but could better analyze these data to identify program trends. TSA collects canine team data using the Canine Website System (CWS), a central management database. TSA uses CWS to capture the amount of time canine teams conduct training as well as searching for explosives odor, among other functions. However, TSA has not fully analyzed the data it collects in CWS to identify program trends and areas that are working well or in need of corrective action. Such analyses could help TSA to determine canine teams' proficiency, inform future deployment efforts, and help ensure that taxpayer funds are used effectively. For example:

- GAO analysis of canine team training data from May 2011 through April 2012 showed that some canine teams were repeatedly not in compliance with TSA's monthly training requirement, which is in place to ensure canine teams remain proficient in explosives detection.
- GAO analysis of TSA's cargo-screening data from September 2011 through July 2012 showed that canine teams primarily responsible for screening air cargo placed on passenger aircraft exceeded their monthly screening requirement. This suggests that TSA could increase the percentage of air cargo it requires air cargo canine teams to screen or redeploy teams.

TSA has not deployed passenger screening canines (PSC)—trained to identify and track explosives odor on a person—consistent with its risk-based approach, and did not determine PSC teams' effectiveness prior to deployment. TSA's 2012 Strategic Framework calls for the deployment of PSC teams based on risk; however, GAO found that PSC teams have not been deployed to the highest-risk airport locations. TSA officials stated that the agency generally defers to airport officials on whether PSC teams will be deployed, and some airport operators have decided against the use of PSC teams at their airports because of concerns related to the composition and capabilities of PSC teams. As a result of these concerns, the PSC teams deployed to higher-risk airport locations are not being used for passenger screening as intended, but for other purposes, such as screening air cargo or training. TSA is coordinating with aviation stakeholders to resolve concerns related to PSC team deployment, but has been unable to resolve these concerns, as of September 2012. Furthermore, TSA began deploying PSC teams in April 2011 prior to determining the teams' operational effectiveness and before identifying where within the airport these teams would be most effectively utilized. TSA is in the process of assessing the effectiveness of PSC teams in the operational environment, but testing is not comprehensive since it does not include all areas at the airport or compare PSCs with already deployed conventional canines (trained to detect explosives in stationary objects). As a result, more comprehensive testing could provide TSA with greater assurance that PSC teams are effective in identifying explosives odor on passengers and provide an enhanced security benefit.

This is a public version of a sensitive report that GAO issued in December 2012. Information TSA deemed Sensitive Security Information has been redacted.