

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-445](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

FPS and USMS conduct building security screening at thousands of GSA buildings across the country. Given continued concerns related to the security of federal buildings, GAO was asked to examine the: (1) challenges federal entities face in their efforts to prevent prohibited items and individuals who may pose a security threat from entering GSA buildings and (2) actions federal entities have taken to assess the effectiveness of their screening efforts, and the results of those actions. GAO conducted site visits to 11 selected buildings in three metropolitan areas based on a variety of criteria, including security level, agency officials' recommendations, and for FPS, possible inconsistencies in its data on prohibited items, and other factors. GAO analyzed FPS's and USMS's data, reviewed relevant documentation, and interviewed FPS and USMS officials in headquarters and the field.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FPS and USMS each develop and implement a strategy for using covert and intrusion testing, and prohibited-items data to improve security-screening efforts. Specifically, for FPS, the strategy would, among other things, help determine which covert testing scenarios to use. For USMS, the strategy would, among other things, help determine the appropriate frequency of intrusion testing. DHS and DOJ concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-15-445](#). For more information, contact Mark L. Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or GoldsteinM@gao.gov.

March 2015

HOMELAND SECURITY

Actions Needed to Better Manage Security Screening at Federal Buildings and Courthouses

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Protective Service (FPS) and the Department of Justice's (DOJ) United States Marshals Service (USMS) experience a range of challenges in their efforts to provide effective security screening, including:

- ***Building characteristics and location may limit security options:*** many General Services Administration (GSA) buildings were designed and constructed before security screening became a priority.
- ***Balancing security and public access:*** striking an appropriate balance between facilitating the public's access to government services and providing adequate security can be difficult, for example, when there is a high volume of visitors.
- ***Operating with limited resources:*** some FPS protective security officers are not fully trained to conduct security screening, and FPS and USMS may have limited funding for additional training or additional security officers.
- ***Working with multiple federal tenants:*** many tenant stakeholders at multi-tenant GSA buildings have differing needs and priorities that may not always align when trying to build consensus for security-screening decisions.
- ***Effectively informing the public of prohibited items:*** prohibited items vary by building, and some signage did not effectively relay information to the public.

To assess security-screening efforts, both FPS and USMS have taken steps such as conducting covert and intrusion tests and collecting data on prohibited items. From fiscal years 2011 to 2013, FPS data show that protective security officers passed covert tests on security-screening procedures at a low rate. In October 2012, FPS reduced the number of screening scenarios used for covert testing, but has since reinstated some of them. USMS data show that court security officers passed intrusion tests on security screening at a higher rate. For example, USMS reported that court security officers passed 83 percent of intrusion tests on security screening in fiscal year 2010, 91 percent in fiscal year 2011, and 92 percent in fiscal years 2012 and 2013. Although USMS tests more frequently than FPS, it has not met its intrusion-test frequency requirement per building each year. In addition, FPS's and USMS's data on prohibited items show wide variations in the number of items identified across buildings. For example, FPS reported it had detected approximately 700,000 prohibited items in 2013; however, FPS data showed that there were 295 buildings with no reported data on prohibited items from fiscal years 2004 through 2013. While FPS and USMS may use the results of covert and intrusion tests to address problems at the individual building or FPS region or USMS district level, to some degree, they do not use the results to strategically assess performance nationwide. The benefits of using data in this manner are reflected in the Interagency Security Committee's (ISC) guidance, as well as key practices in security and internal control standards GAO has developed. Without a more strategic approach to assessing performance, both FPS and USMS are not well positioned to improve security screening nationwide, identify trends and lessons learned, and address the aforementioned challenges related to screening in a complex security environment.