Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. airspace system is one of the safest in the world, but incidents and near misses at and around U.S. terminal areas still occur. FAA oversees the safety of runways and taxiways and works with industry partners—including airlines, airports, pilots, and others—to improve safety in these areas. Despite FAA’s continued efforts, the number of reported terminal area incidents has increased over time.

GAO was asked to review various issues related to runway safety and to update its prior work on airport terminal areas. This report examines: (1) the extent to which FAA uses data to analyze terminal area incidents and (2) efforts FAA and others have implemented to improve terminal area safety, and how FAA assesses their effectiveness. GAO analyzed FAA data; interviewed officials from 10 airports selected based on high runway incident rates in the past 3 years, among other factors; and interviewed federal and industry officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations including that FAA identify and remove duplicate excursion data, develop processes to analyze ramp area incidents, and establish a plan to assess the effectiveness of its terminal area safety efforts.

FAA concurred with the recommendations.