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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-92](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

More than 5.5 billion pounds of explosives are used each year in the United States by private sector companies and government entities. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has authority to regulate explosives and to license privately owned explosives storage facilities. After the July 2004 theft of several hundred pounds of explosives from a state and local government storage facility, concerns arose about vulnerability to theft.

GAO analyzed (1) the extent of explosives thefts from state and local government facilities, (2) ATF's authority to regulate and oversee state and local government explosives storage facilities, (3) the information ATF collects about state and local government storage facilities, and (4) security oversight measures in place at selected state and local government storage facilities.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Attorney General direct the ATF Director to clarify explosives incident reporting regulations to ensure that all entities storing explosives, including state and local government agencies, understand their obligation to report all thefts or missing explosives. The Department of Justice agreed with GAO's recommendation and indicated it would take steps to implement it.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-92](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-92).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Laurie Ekstrand at (202) 512-8777 or [ekstrandl@gao.gov](mailto:ekstrandl@gao.gov).

## ATF

# Thefts of Explosives from State and Local Government Storage Facilities Are Few but May Be Underreported

## What GAO Found

Judging from available ATF data, there have been few thefts of explosives from state and local government storage facilities. From January 2002 to February 2005, ATF received only 9 reports of thefts or missing explosives from state and local facilities, compared with a total of 205 explosives thefts reported nationwide during this same period. During the course of our audit, we found evidence of 5 thefts from state and local government facilities, 1 of which did not appear in ATF's national database on thefts and missing explosives. Thus, the actual number of thefts occurring at state and local storage facilities could be higher than that identified by ATF data.

ATF has no authority to oversee or inspect all state and local government explosives storage facilities. State and local government agencies are not required to obtain a license from ATF to use and store explosives, and only licensees—such as private sector explosives storage facilities—are subject to mandatory oversight. As a result, ATF has no means to ensure that state and local government facilities are in compliance with federal regulations.

While ATF does not collect nationwide information about state and local government explosives storage facilities, information about some of these facilities is collected—for example, when facility operators voluntarily request an ATF inspection. Since January 2002, ATF has conducted 77 voluntary inspections at state and local storage facilities and found no systemic violations. By comparison, all licensed private sector facilities must submit a variety of information about their facility—including location and security measures in place—to ATF during the licensing process. ATF also collects information about these facilities during mandatory inspections.

At the 18 state and local government storage facilities we visited, a variety of security measures were in place, including locked gates, fencing, patrols, and in some cases, electronic surveillance. All the facilities' officials told GAO that they conducted routine inventories. But most were not required to be licensed or inspected by state or local regulatory agencies. We identified several instances of possible noncompliance with federal regulations, related primarily to storage safety issues rather than security.

### Explosives Storage Facility in Pennsylvania



Source: GAO.