



Highlights of [GAO-09-803](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The growing volume of consumer products imported into the United States has strained the resources of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC), challenging the agency to find new ways to ensure the safety of these products. The Consumer Product Safety Improvement Act (CPSIA) mandated that GAO assess the effectiveness of CPSC's authorities over imported products. GAO's objectives were to (1) determine what is known about CPSC's effectiveness in using these authorities, (2) compare CPSC's authorities with those of selected U.S. agencies and international entities, and (3) evaluate CPSC's plans to prevent the entry of unsafe consumer products. To address these objectives, GAO analyzed CPSC and other agencies' and entities' authorities, reviewed literature on consumer product safety, and compared CPSC's planning efforts with criteria for effective planning practices.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CPSC (1) ensure expeditious implementation of key CPSIA provisions; (2) take several actions to strengthen its ability to target shipments of unsafe consumer products, such as resolving issues with CBP for obtaining more data on incoming shipments; and (3) develop a long-term plan for ensuring the safety of consumer products entering the United States, including long-term plans for international engagement. CPSC agreed with these recommendations.

[View GAO-09-803 or key components.](#)  
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## CONSUMER SAFETY

### Better Information and Planning Would Strengthen CPSC's Oversight of Imported Products

#### What GAO Found

GAO found broad consensus that CPSC's authorities over imported consumer products have the potential to be effective. However, CPSC has made limited progress in measuring the effectiveness of its authorities, and CPSC's ability to implement these authorities has been constrained by competing priorities and limited resources, as well as by delays in implementing key provisions of CPSIA. CPSC's presence at U.S. ports is limited and, in order to identify potentially unsafe products, it must work closely with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), which faces pressure to quickly move shipments into commerce. CPSC does not have access to key CBP import data it could use to target incoming shipments for inspection, and it has not updated its agreements with CBP to clarify each agency's roles and responsibilities. CPSC's activities at U.S. ports could be strengthened by better targeting incoming shipments for inspection and by improving CPSC's coordination with CBP. Otherwise, CPSC may not be able to carry out key inspection activities efficiently or to effectively leverage its enforcement priorities with CBP.

Select federal agencies and foreign governments provide lessons for strengthening CPSC's implementation of its authorities, particularly with respect to border surveillance and information sharing among countries. Both USDA and FDA have more robust border surveillance activities than CPSC because they obtain more data on incoming shipments, have more staff working at U.S. ports, use more developed programs to target risks, and use information technology systems that are integrated with other agency-based and CBP systems to effectively leverage their enforcement priorities with CBP. Other agencies have found that timely CBP import data integrated with other agency surveillance data is useful in screening incoming shipments for potential safety violations. In addition, officials at FDA and USDA have found that efforts to educate overseas industries and governments on U.S. safety standards could reduce the number of unsafe products that reach U.S. consumers. GAO also found broad consensus that continued coordination and information sharing among governments and multilateral organizations can improve the effectiveness of product safety frameworks. CPSC has increased its efforts to coordinate with these other entities, particularly China, but lacks a comprehensive plan for international engagement.

CPSC has established annual plans, but lacks a long-term plan with key goals to prevent the entry of unsafe products. CPSC has not yet updated its agencywide Strategic Plan to reflect new authorities granted in CPSIA. This may inhibit CPSC's ability to appropriately allocate any potential increases in agency resources or to address the safety of imported products through international means. An updated Strategic Plan may also help to ensure that CPSC has the requisite compliance and analytical staff to support the full range of CPSC's international efforts.