

Highlights of [GAO-12-422T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Cargo containers that are part of the global supply chain—the flow of goods from manufacturers to retailers—are vulnerable to threats from terrorists. The Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA) of 2002 and the Security and Accountability For Every (SAFE) Port Act of 2006 required the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to take actions to improve maritime transportation security. Also, the Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (9/11 Act) required, among other things, that by July 2012, 100 percent of all U.S.-bound cargo containers be scanned. Within DHS, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is responsible for container security programs to address these requirements. This testimony addresses, among other things, (1) efforts to gather advance information about container shipments to assess risks, (2) technologies used to protect the integrity of containers and scan them, and (3) the status of efforts to scan 100 percent of U.S.-bound containers. GAO's statement is based on products issued from April 2005 through July 2011, along with selected updates conducted from January to February 2012. Updates involved collecting information from CBP on the status of efforts to address GAO's prior recommendations on these issues and its plans to implement 100 percent scanning.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations in past reports to DHS to strengthen its container security efforts. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendations and has either addressed them or is undertaking efforts to address them.

View [GAO-12-422T](#). For more information, contact Stephen L. Caldwell at (202) 512-9610 or caldwells@gao.gov.

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SUPPLY CHAIN SECURITY

Container Security Programs Have Matured, but Uncertainty Persists over the Future of 100 Percent Scanning

What GAO Found

As part of its efforts to identify high-risk cargo for inspection, CBP uses various sources of information to screen containers in advance of their arrival in the United States. For example, in 2009, CBP implemented the Importer Security Filing and Additional Carrier Requirements to collect additional information for targeting. The additional cargo information required, such as country of origin, is to be provided to CBP in advance of arrival of the cargo containers at U.S. ports. In September 2010, GAO recommended that CBP establish milestones and time frames for updating its targeting criteria to include the additional information. In response, CBP updated its targeting criteria in January 2011.

DHS has made some progress in developing and implementing container security technologies to protect the integrity of containers and to scan them. GAO reported in September 2010 that DHS's Science and Technology Directorate initiated four container security technology projects to detect and report intrusions into cargo containers. However, operational testing had not occurred to ensure the prototypes would function as intended. Therefore, GAO recommended that testing and evaluation occur in all environments in which DHS planned to implement the technologies. DHS concurred and has made progress implementing this recommendation. To prevent the smuggling of nuclear and radiological materials, CBP, in coordination with the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO), has deployed over 1,400 radiation portal monitors (RPM) at U.S. ports of entry to detect the presence of radiation in cargo containers. Since 2006, GAO reported on problems with DNDO's efforts to deploy a more-advanced and significantly more-expensive type of RPM. Among other things, GAO reported that an updated cost-benefit analysis might show that DNDO's program to replace existing equipment with the advanced technology was not justified. After spending more than \$200 million, DHS ended the program in July 2011.

Uncertainty persists over how DHS and CBP will fulfill the mandate for 100 percent scanning given that the feasibility remains unproven in light of the challenges CBP has faced implementing a pilot program for 100 percent scanning. In response to the SAFE Port Act requirement to implement a pilot program to determine the feasibility of 100 percent scanning, CBP, the Department of State, and the Department of Energy announced the formation of the Secure Freight Initiative (SFI) pilot program in December 2006. However, logistical, technological, and other challenges prevented the participating ports from achieving 100 percent scanning and CBP has since reduced the scope of the SFI program from six ports to one. In October 2009, GAO recommended that CBP perform an assessment to determine if 100 percent scanning is feasible, and if it is, the best way to achieve it, or if it is not feasible, present acceptable alternatives. However, to date, CBP has not conducted such an assessment or identified alternatives to 100 percent scanning. Further, as GAO previously reported, DHS acknowledged it will not be able to meet the 9/11 Act's July 2012 deadline for implementing the 100 percent scanning requirement, and therefore, it expects to grant a blanket extension to all foreign ports pursuant to the statute, thus extending the target date to July 2014. To do so, DHS is required to report to Congress by May 2, 2012, of any extensions it plans to grant.