

Highlights of [GAO-12-708](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Initiated in 2008, Secure Communities is an ICE program designed to identify potentially removable aliens, particularly those with criminal convictions, in state and local law enforcement custody. Fingerprints checked against a Federal Bureau of Investigation criminal database are checked against DHS's immigration database to help determine whether an arrested individual is removable. GAO was asked to review Secure Communities operations. This report addresses (1) enforcement trends under Secure Communities, (2) ICE's adherence to best practices in acquiring Secure Communities-related technology, and (3) ICE safeguards to help protect against potential civil rights abuses under Secure Communities. GAO analyzed ICE data on removals from October 2008 through March 2012, and arrest charges from October 2010 through March 2012; reviewed program guidance, policies, and reports; and interviewed ICE's Law Enforcement Support Center and agency officials, local law enforcement and community groups in four locations selected for geographic diversity, among other factors. These perspectives are not generalizable, but provided insights into Secure Communities operations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that ICE develop well-defined requirements and an integrated master schedule that accounts for all activities for its technology contracts, and a plan for workforce changes in preparation for full technology deployment. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-12-708](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gambler@gao.gov.

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SECURE COMMUNITIES

Criminal Alien Removals Increased, but Technology Planning Improvements Needed

What GAO Found

Data from the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) indicate that the percentage of its removals attributable to Secure Communities increased from about 4 percent in fiscal year 2009 to about 20 percent in fiscal year 2011. Of about 183,000 aliens removed under the program from October 2008 through March 2012, about 74 percent had a criminal conviction. ICE did not have state or local arrest charges for about 56 percent of alien Secure Communities removals from October 2010 (when ICE began collecting arrest charges) through March 2012, so we were unable to determine the most frequent arrest charges under the program. For the 44 percent of aliens removed on whom ICE collected arrest charge data, traffic offenses, including driving under the influence of alcohol, were the most frequent arrest charges. ICE is taking steps to improve the collection of arrest charge data, but it is too early to assess the effectiveness of its efforts.

ICE has not consistently followed best practices in acquiring technology to help determine the immigration status of aliens identified by Secure Communities. ICE awarded contracts to modernize its technology without fully defining requirements or developing an integrated master schedule—two best practices for managing capital programs. As a result, ICE encountered delays, cost increases, and products that did not meet ICE's needs. For example, ICE spent \$14.3 million for one contract to develop services that ICE found to be unusable. Establishing well-defined requirements and developing an integrated schedule for completing technology modernization could better position ICE to prevent delays and cost increases. Further, ICE plans to develop a workforce plan after the systems are deployed. Developing a workforce plan prior to full system deployment, consistent with internal controls, could better position ICE to effectively use staff when it deploys the modernized technology.

DHS's Office of Civil Rights and ICE identified four safeguards to help protect aliens' civil rights under Secure Communities, including providing detainees with a revised detainer form with telephone numbers to call when they feel their civil rights have been violated. Officials are also developing briefing materials on how to protect aliens' civil rights, statistically analyzing arrest and other information to identify potential civil rights abuses, and using an existing DHS complaint process for addressing Secure Communities concerns.

Number and Percentage of ICE's Removals Attributed to Secure Communities, by Fiscal Year

Year	ICE removals	Removals attributed to Secure Communities	Percentage of ICE removals attributed to Secure Communities
2009	389,834	14,363	4
2010	392,862	49,498	13
2011	396,606	79,876	20
2012: October 2011 through March 2012	187,763	39,159	21
Total	1,367,065	182,896	13

Source: GAO analysis of data provided by ICE.