

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-269T](#), testimony before the Subcommittee on Government Operations, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

TSA maintains a federal workforce to screen passengers and baggage at the majority of the nation's commercial airports, but it also oversees a workforce of private screeners at airports who participate in the SPP. The SPP allows commercial airports to apply to have screening performed by private screeners, who are to provide a level of screening services and protection that equals or exceeds that of federal screeners. In recent years, TSA's SPP has evolved to incorporate changes in policy and federal law, prompting enhanced interest in measuring screener performance.

This testimony addresses the extent to which TSA (1) has provided guidance to airport operators for the SPP application process and (2) assesses and monitors the performance of private and federal screeners. This statement is based on a report GAO issued in December 2012 and selected updates conducted in January 2014. To conduct the selected updates, GAO reviewed documentation, such as the *SPP Annual Report* issued in January 2013, and interviewed agency officials on the status of implementing GAO's recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making no new recommendations in this statement.

View [GAO-14-269T](#). For more information, contact Jennifer Grover at (202) 512-7141 or GroverJ@gao.gov.

January 2014

SCREENING PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

TSA Issued Application Guidance and Developed a Mechanism to Monitor Private versus Federal Screener Performance

What GAO Found

Since GAO reported on this issue in December 2012, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has developed application guidance for airport operators applying to the Screening Partnership Program (SPP). In December 2012, GAO reported that TSA had not provided guidance to airport operators on its application and approval process, which had been revised to reflect requirements in the Federal Aviation Administration Modernization and Reform Act of 2012. Further, airport operators GAO interviewed at the time generally stated that they faced difficulties completing the revised application, such as how to obtain cost information. Therefore, GAO recommended that TSA develop application guidance, and TSA concurred. To address GAO's recommendation, TSA updated its SPP website in December 2012 by providing general application guidance and a description of the criteria and process the agency uses to assess airports' SPP applications. The guidance provides examples of information that airports could consider providing to TSA to help assess their suitability for the program and also outlines how the agency will analyze cost information. The new guidance addresses the intent of GAO's recommendation and should help improve transparency of the SPP application process as well as help airport operators determine whether their airports are good candidates for the SPP.

TSA has also developed a mechanism to regularly monitor private versus federal screener performance. In December 2012, GAO found differences in performance between SPP and non-SPP airports based on its analysis of screener performance data. However, while TSA had conducted or commissioned prior reports comparing the performance of SPP and non-SPP airports, TSA officials stated at the time that they did not plan to conduct similar analyses in the future, and instead stated that they were using across-the-board mechanisms to assess screener performance across all commercial airports. In December 2012, GAO found that these across-the-board mechanisms did not summarize information for the SPP as a whole or across years, which made it difficult to identify changes in private screener performance. GAO concluded that monitoring private screener performance in comparison with federal screener performance was consistent with the statutory provision authorizing TSA to enter into contracts with private screening companies and recommended that TSA develop a mechanism to regularly monitor private versus federal screener performance. TSA concurred with the recommendation. To address GAO's recommendation, in January 2013, TSA issued its first *SPP Annual Report*, which provides an analysis of private versus federal screener performance. Further, in September 2013, a TSA Assistant Administrator signed an operations directive that provides internal guidance for preparing the *SPP Annual Report*, including the requirement that the report annually verify that the level of screening services and protection provided at SPP airports is equal to or greater than the level that would be provided by federal screeners. These actions address the intent of GAO's recommendation and could assist TSA in identifying performance changes that could lead to improvements in the program.