Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Government Operations, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

For Release on Delivery
Expected at 10:00 a.m. EST
Tuesday, January 14, 2014

SCREENING PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

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

Statement of Jennifer Grover, Acting Director, Homeland Security and Justice

GAO Highlights

SCREENING PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

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

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.

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.

_____ **United States Government Accountability Office**

Chairman Mica, Ranking Member Connolly, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss our work on the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Screening Partnership Program (SPP). TSA, a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is responsible for ensuring the security of the traveling public through, among other things, screening passengers traveling by aircraft for explosives and other prohibited items. To fulfill this responsibility, TSA maintains a federal workforce of screeners at a majority of the nation's commercial airports, but also oversees a smaller workforce of private screeners employed by companies under contract to TSA at airports that participate in TSA's SPP.[1] The SPP, established in 2004 in accordance with provisions of the Aviation Transportation Security Act (ATSA), allows commercial airports an opportunity to "opt out" of federal screening by applying to TSA to have private screeners perform the screening function.[2] At airports with private screeners, TSA continues to be responsible for overseeing airport screening operations and ensuring that the private contractors provide effective and efficient security operations in a manner consistent with law and other TSA requirements; however, the screening of passengers and baggage at these airports is performed by private screening contractors selected and approved by TSA.[3] As of January 2014, there are 14 airports participating in the SPP, as well as 6

---

[1]For purposes of this report, a "commercial airport" is any airport in the United States that operates pursuant to a TSA-approved security program in accordance with 49 C.F.R. pt. 1542 and at which TSA performs or oversees the performance of screening services, of which there are approximately 450 as of November 2013. We refer to airports that are participating in the SPP as SPP airports and the screeners in those airports as private screeners. We refer to airports not participating in the SPP as non-SPP airports and the screeners in those airports as federal screeners.

[2]See Pub. L. No. 107-71, § 108, 115 Stat. 597, 611-13 (2001) (codified as amended at 49 U.S.C. §§ 44919-20). TSA established the SPP in 2004 after concluding a 2-year pilot program through which four private screening companies performed screening operations at 5 commercial airports (one contractor served 2 airports).

[3]The SPP contractor's responsibilities include recruiting, assessing, and training screening personnel to provide security screening functions in accordance with TSA regulations, policies, and procedures. SPP contractors are also expected to take operational direction from TSA to help ensure they meet the terms and conditions of the contract.

airports approved for participation and awaiting the selection of a screening contractor.[4]

The standard by which TSA evaluates airport applications for participation in the SPP has changed since the program's inception in 2004. First, in January 2011, the TSA Administrator announced his decision not to expand the SPP beyond the 16 airports that were participating in the program at that time "unless a clear and substantial advantage to do so emerges in the future." In so doing, the Administrator cited his interest in helping the agency evolve into a "more agile, high-performing organization that can meet the security threats of today and the future" as the reason for his decision. Of the 6 airports that submitted applications from March 2009 through January 2012 and that were evaluated under the "clear and substantial advantage" standard, TSA approved the application of 1 airport and denied the applications of the other 5. Second, according to TSA officials, the Federal Aviation Administration Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 (FAA Modernization Act), enacted in February 2012, prompted TSA to change the standard by which it evaluates SPP applications and requires, among other things, that the TSA Administrator approve an SPP application submitted by an airport operator if the Administrator determines that the approval would not compromise security or detrimentally affect the cost-efficiency or the effectiveness of the screening of passengers or property at the airport.[5]

My testimony today 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 our December 2012 report and selected

---

[4]According to TSA, in July 2013, the Department of Transportation ended the Essential Air Service subsidy to two of the SPP airports in eastern Montana. The loss of the subsidy resulted in the discontinuation of air service to and from those airports that required the implementation of TSA-required screening measures. Therefore, the total number of airports in the SPP was reduced from 16 to 14. Between January and August 2012, TSA approved the applications of six airports. One of these airports, Sacramento International Airport, CA, withdrew its application in January 2013. Sarasota-Bradenton International Airport, FL submitted its application for participation to the SPP in February 2013 and was approved for participation in May 2013, bringing the total number of airports approved for participation and awaiting selection of a screening contractor back to six.

[5]See Pub. L. No. 112-95, § 830(a), 126 Stat. 11, 135 (2012) (codified at 49 U.S.C. § 44920(b)). The term airport operator means a person that operates a "commercial airport," as that term is used in this report. See also 49 C.F.R. § 1540.5 (defining the term "airport operator").

updates on the status of recommendations made in our December 2012 report.[6] For our December 2012 report, we analyzed past and current SPP application forms and instructions and interviewed airport operators, screeners, SPP contractors, SPP applicants, TSA headquarters officials, and Federal Security Directors (FSD).[7] We also compared TSA's process for reviewing applications and monitoring performance of private and federal screeners against Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government to determine if any improvements were needed.[8] To determine how screener performance compares at SPP and non-SPP airports, we compared screener performance for the 16 SPP airports that were participating in the SPP at that time to the average performance of other airports in their category, as well as nationally, from fiscal year 2009 through 2011.[9] More detailed information on the scope and methodology appears in our December 2012 report. To update our work, we obtained related documentation, such as the *SPP Annual Report* issued in January 2013, and interviewed agency officials in January 2014 on progress made to implement the recommendations from our December 2012 report related to application guidance and monitoring of private versus federal screener performance. We conducted the work on which this statement is based in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

---

[6]GAO, *Screening Partnership Program: TSA Should Issue More Guidance to Airports and Monitor Private versus Federal Screener Performance*, GAO-13-208 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 6, 2012).

[7]FSDs are TSA officials that provide day-to-day operational direction for security operations at the airports within their jurisdiction, including those participating in the SPP.

[8]GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1 (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 1999).

[9]TSA classifies commercial airports in the United States into one of five security risk categories (X, I, II, III, and IV) based on various factors, such as the total number of takeoffs and landings annually, and other special security considerations. In general, category X airports have the largest number of passenger boardings, and category IV airports have the smallest.

Background

On November 19, 2002, pursuant to ATSA, TSA began a 2-year pilot program at 5 airports using private screening companies to screen passengers and checked baggage.[10] In 2004, at the completion of the pilot program, and in accordance with ATSA, TSA established the SPP, whereby any airport authority, whether involved in the pilot or not, could request a transition from federal screeners to private, contracted screeners. All of the 5 pilot airports that applied were approved to continue as part of the SPP, and since its establishment, 21 additional airport applications have been accepted by the SPP.[11]

In March 2012, TSA revised the SPP application to reflect requirements of the FAA Modernization Act, enacted in February 2012.[12] Among other provisions, the act provides that

- Not later than 120 days after the date of receipt of an SPP application submitted by an airport operator, the TSA Administrator must approve or deny the application.
- The TSA Administrator shall approve an application if approval would not (1) compromise security, (2) detrimentally affect the cost-efficiency of the screening of passengers or property at the airport, or (3) detrimentally affect the effectiveness of the screening of passengers or property at the airport.
- Within 60 days of a denial, TSA must provide the airport operator, as well as the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the Committee on Homeland Security of the House of Representatives, a written report that sets forth the findings that

---

[10]See 49 U.S.C. § 44919. The pilot program was to assess the feasibility of having qualified private screening companies provide airport security screening services in lieu of federal screeners. The following airports from each security risk category were selected to participate: (1) San Francisco International Airport—category X, (2) Kansas City International Airport—category I, (3) Greater Rochester International Airport—category II (now a category I airport), (4) Jackson Hole Airport—category III, and (5) Tupelo Regional Airport—category IV.

[11]A total of 26 airports have been approved to the SPP since its inception in 2004, including the 14 airports currently participating in the SPP and the 6 airports approved for participation and awaiting the selection of a screening contractor. Of the remaining 6 approved airports, 4 airports had participated in the SPP but left the program after commercial air service was discontinued at the airport and 2 withdrew their applications after being approved. For more information on the history of application to the SPP, see GAO-13-208.

[12]See generally Pub. L. No. 112-95, § 803, 126 Stat. at 135-36.

served as the basis of the denial, the results of any cost or security analysis conducted in considering the application, and recommendations on how the airport operator can address the reasons for denial.

All commercial airports are eligible to apply to the SPP. To apply, an airport operator must complete the SPP application and submit it to the SPP Program Management Office (PMO), as well as to the FSD for its airport, by mail, fax, or e-mail. Figure 1 illustrates the SPP application process.

Figure 1: Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Screening Partnership Program (SPP) Application Process
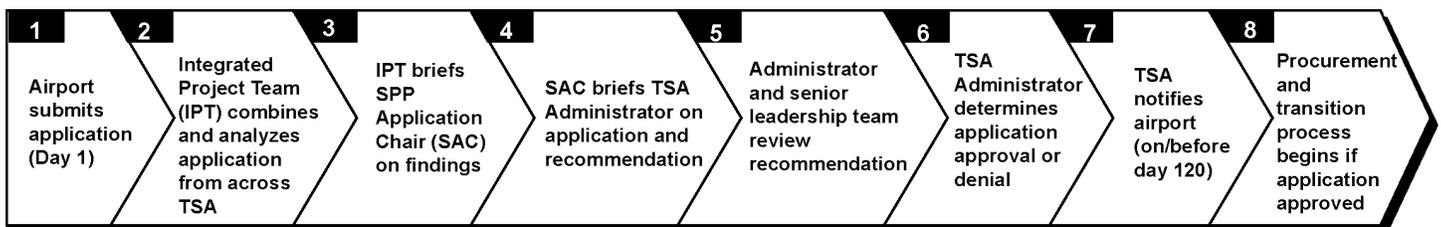
Source: GAO analysis of TSA information.

Note: The IPT is made up of TSA staff from various offices across TSA, including offices related to human capital, information technology, security capabilities, and acquisitions.

Although TSA provides all airports with the opportunity to apply for participation in the SPP, authority to approve or deny the application resides in the discretion of the TSA Administrator. According to TSA officials, in addition to the cost-efficiency and effectiveness considerations mandated by FAA Modernization Act, there are many other factors that are weighed in considering an airport's application for SPP participation. For example, the potential impacts of any upcoming projects at the airport are considered. Once an airport is approved for SPP participation and a private screening contractor has been selected by TSA, the contract screening workforce assumes responsibility for screening passengers and their property and is required to adhere to the same security regulations, standard operating procedures, and other TSA security requirements followed by federal screeners at non-SPP airports.

TSA Has Developed Program Application Guidance to Help Improve Transparency of Its Process and Assist Airports in Completing their Applications

Since our December 2012 report, TSA has developed guidance to assist airport operators in completing their SPP applications, as we recommended. In December 2012, we reported that TSA had developed some resources to assist SPP applicants, but it had not provided guidance on its application and approval process to assist airports. As the application process was originally implemented in 2004, the SPP application process required only that an interested airport operator submit an application stating its intention to opt out of federal screening as well as its reasons for wanting to do so. In 2011, TSA revised its SPP application to reflect the "clear and substantial advantage" standard announced by the Administrator in January 2011. Specifically, TSA requested that the applicant explain how private screening at the airport would provide a clear and substantial advantage to TSA's security operations.[13] At that time, TSA did not provide written guidance to airports to assist them in understanding what would constitute a "clear and substantial advantage to TSA security operations" or TSA's basis for determining whether an airport had met that standard.

As previously noted, in March 2012 TSA again revised the SPP application in accordance with provisions of the FAA Modernization Act, which became law in February 2012. Among other things, the revised application no longer included the "clear and substantial advantage" question, but instead included questions that requested applicants to discuss how participating in the SPP would not compromise security at the airport and to identify potential areas where cost savings or efficiencies may be realized. In December 2012, we reported that while TSA provided general instructions for filling out the SPP application as well as responses to frequently asked questions (FAQ), the agency had not issued guidance to assist airports with completing the revised application nor explained to airports how it would evaluate applications given the changes brought about by the FAA Modernization Act. For example, neither the application instructions or the FAQs addressed TSA's SPP application evaluation process or its basis for determining whether an airport's entry into the SPP would compromise security or affect cost-efficiency and effectiveness.

---

[13]For more on the specific wording of this and other questions from the application, see GAO-13-208.

Further, we found that airport operators who completed the applications generally stated that they faced difficulties in doing so and that additional guidance would have been helpful.[14] For example, one operator stated that he needed cost information to help demonstrate that his airport's participation in the SPP would not detrimentally affect the cost-efficiency of the screening of passengers or property at the airport and that he believed not presenting this information would be detrimental to his airport's application. However, TSA officials at the time said that airports do not need to provide this information to TSA because, as part of the application evaluation process, TSA conducts a detailed cost analysis using historical cost data from SPP and non-SPP airports. The absence of cost and other information in an individual airport's application, TSA officials noted, would not materially affect the TSA Administrator's decision on an SPP application.

Therefore, we reported in December 2012 that while TSA had approved all applications submitted since enactment of the FAA Modernization Act, it was hard to determine how many more airports, if any, would have applied to the program had TSA provided application guidance and information to improve transparency of the SPP application process. Specifically, we reported that in the absence of such application guidance and information, it may be difficult for airport officials to evaluate whether their airports are good candidates for the SPP or determine what criteria TSA uses to accept and approve airports' SPP applications. Further, we concluded that clear guidance for applying to the SPP could improve the transparency of the application process and help ensure that the existing application process is implemented in a consistent and uniform manner. Thus, we recommended that TSA develop guidance that clearly (1) states the criteria and process that TSA is using to assess whether participation in the SPP would compromise security or detrimentally affect the cost-efficiency or the effectiveness of the screening of passengers or property at the airport, (2) states how TSA will obtain and analyze cost information

---

[14]For our December 2012 report, we interviewed 4 of the 5 airport operators that applied to the SPP since TSA revised its application after enactment of the FAA Modernization Act. All 5 of the applications were subsequently approved by TSA. We reported that 3 of the 4 operators we interviewed struggled to answer the application questions related to the cost-efficiency of converting to the SPP because they did not have data on federal screening costs, while the fourth airport operator did not need additional information or guidance to respond to the question. Further, 3 of the 4 airport operators we interviewed said that additional guidance would have been helpful in completing the application and determining how TSA evaluates the applications. See GAO-13-208 for more information.

regarding screening cost-efficiency and effectiveness and the implications of not responding to the related application questions, and (3) provides specific examples of additional information airports should consider providing to TSA to help assess an airport's suitability for the SPP.

TSA concurred with our recommendation and has taken actions to address it. Specifically, TSA updated its SPP website in December 2012 by providing (1) general guidance to assist airports with completing the SPP application and (2) a description of the criteria and process the agency will use to assess airports' applications to participate in the SPP. While the guidance states that TSA has no specific expectations of the information an airport could provide that may be pertinent to its application, it provides some examples of information TSA has found useful and that airports could consider providing to TSA to help assess their suitability for the program. Further, the guidance, in combination with the description of the SPP application evaluation process, outlines how TSA plans to analyze and use cost information regarding screening cost-efficiency and effectiveness. The guidance also states that providing cost information is optional and that not providing such information will not affect the application decision. We believe that these actions address the intent of our recommendation and should help improve transparency of the SPP application process as well as help airport officials determine whether their airports are good candidates for the SPP.

Performance between SPP and Non-SPP Airports Varied; TSA Recently Developed a Mechanism to Monitor Private versus Federal Screener Performance

Performance Varied between SPP and Non-SPP Airports for Some Measures, but Differences Cannot Be Entirely Attributed to the Use of Private or Federal Screeners	In our December 2012 report, we analyzed screener performance data for four measures and found that there were differences in performance between SPP and non-SPP airports, and those differences could not be exclusively attributed to the use of either federal or private screeners. The four measures we selected to compare screener performance at SPP and non-SPP airports were Threat Image Projection (TIP) detection rates, recertification pass rates, Aviation Security Assessment Program (ASAP) test results, and Presence, Advisement, Communication, and Execution (PACE) evaluation results (see table 1). For each of these four measures, we compared the performance of each of the 16 airports then participating in the SPP with the average performance for each airport's category (X, I, II, III, or IV), as well as the national performance averages for all airports for fiscal years 2009 through 2011.[15]

Table 1: Performance Measures Used to Compare Screener Performance at Screening Partnership Program (SPP) and Non-SPP Airports, December 2012

Performance measure	Description
Threat Image Projection (TIP) detection rates	TIPs are fictional threat images (guns, knives, improvised explosive devices, etc.) superimposed onto carry-on baggage as it passes through the X-ray machine. While screening carry-on baggage, screeners identify that a potential threat has been spotted by selecting a "threat" button. If the identified image is a TIP, the X-ray machine informs the screener that the threat was fictional. Otherwise, a screener will search the bag, as the threat object may be real.
Recertification pass rates	In order to maintain their certification to screen passengers and baggage, all screeners (at both SPP and non-SPP airports) must pass several recertification tests on an annual basis. These tests include assessments of threat detection skills on carry-on and checked baggage X-ray machines as well as role-playing scenarios to assess other job functions, such as physical bag searches, pat-downs, and screening passengers with disabilities.
Aviation Security Assessment Program (ASAP) tests results	ASAP tests are covert performance assessments conducted at both screening checkpoints and checked baggage screening areas. Tests are implemented locally by unrecognizable role players who attempt to pass standard test items, such as knives, guns, or simulated improvised explosive devices, through the screening checkpoints or checked baggage screening areas.
Presence, Advisement, Communications, and Execution (PACE) evaluations	PACE evaluations are used to assess screener performance on various elements that may affect security and a passenger's overall traveling experience. PACE evaluators visit a checkpoint covertly and assess the screening personnel on a variety of elements, such as whether the officers provide comprehensive instruction and engage passengers in a calm and respectful manner when screening. Because PACE evaluations began as a baseline assessment program in fiscal year 2011 and had only been implemented only at category X, I, and II airports, our analysis for this measure was limited to the 6 SPP airports in those categories during fiscal year 2011.[a]

Source: GAO analysis of TSA information.

---

[15] Additional information on these performance measures and how we selected them can be found in our December 2012 report. See GAO-13-208.

As we reported in December 2012, on the basis of our analyses, we found that, generally, certain SPP airports performed slightly above the airport category and national averages for some measures, while others performed slightly below. For example, SPP airports performed above their respective airport category averages for recertification pass rates in the majority of instances, while the majority of SPP airports that took PACE evaluations in 2011 performed below their airport category averages.[16] For TIP detection rates, SPP airports performed above their respective airport category averages in about half of the instances. However, we also reported in December 2012 that the differences we observed in private and federal screener performance cannot be entirely attributed to the type of screeners at an airport, because, according to TSA officials and other subject matter experts, many factors, some of which cannot be controlled for, affect screener performance. These factors include, but are not limited to, checkpoint layout, airline schedules, seasonal changes in travel volume, and type of traveler.[17]

We also reported in December 2012 that TSA collects data on several other performance measures but, for various reasons, the data cannot be used to compare private and federal screener performance for the purposes of our review. For example, passenger wait time data could not be used because we found that TSA's policy for collecting wait times changed during the time period of our analyses and that these data were not collected in a consistent manner across all airports.[18] We also

---

[16]For recertification pass rates, the term "instance" means performance by an airport during a particular year or fiscal year, while for TIP detection rates, the term means performance by an airport during a particular fiscal year for a specific type of screening machine.

[17]DHS deemed the details of our analyses of the four performance measures we used for comparing SPP with non-SPP screener performance as classified or sensitive security information; thus, these details are not included in this testimony.

[18]TSA's policy for measuring wait time changed in March 2010. Instead of collecting precise wait times every hour, TSA began only recording instances in which the wait time was more than 20 or 30 minutes. Further, through our site visits conducted for the December 2012 report, we learned that airports collect wait time data in different ways. For example, some airports calculate the wait time from the end of the queue until the passenger reaches the travel document checker podium; other airports calculate the time from the end of the line until the passenger passes through the walkthrough metal detector after being screened or the advanced imaging technology. See GAO-13-208.

considered reviewing human capital measures such as attrition, absenteeism, and injury rates, but did not analyze these data because TSA's Office of Human Capital does not collect these data for SPP airports. We reported that while the contractors collect and report this information to the SPP PMO, TSA does not validate the accuracy of the self-reported data nor does it require contractors to use the same human capital measures as TSA, and accordingly, differences may exist in how the metrics are defined and how the data are collected. Therefore, we found that TSA could not guarantee that a comparison of SPP and non-SPP airports on these human capital metrics would be an equal comparison.

TSA Has Developed a Mechanism to Monitor Private Screener Performance Separately from the Performance of Federal Screeners

Since our December 2012 report, TSA has developed a mechanism to regularly monitor private versus federal screener performance, as we recommended. In December 2012, we reported that while TSA monitored screener performance at all airports, the agency did not monitor private screener performance separately from federal screener performance or conduct regular reviews comparing the performance of SPP and non-SPP airports. Beginning in April 2012, TSA introduced a new set of performance measures to assess screener performance at all airports (both SPP and non-SPP) in its Office of Security Operations Executive Scorecard (the Scorecard). Officials told us at the time of our December 2012 review that they provided the Scorecard to FSDs every 2 weeks to assist the FSDs with tracking performance against stated goals and with determining how performance of the airports under their jurisdiction compared with national averages.[19] According to TSA, the 10 measures used in the Scorecard were selected based on input from FSDs and regional directors on the performance measures that most adequately reflected screener and airport performance.[20] Performance measures in

---

[19]Although FSDs provide day-to-day operational direction for security operations at the airports within their jurisdiction, including those participating in the SPP; FSDs have responsibility for overall security at SPP airports but do not have direct control over workforce management. Rather, the SPP contractor is contractually obligated to effectively and efficiently manage its screening workforce.

[20]Prior to the Scorecard, from 2006 through April 2012, FSDs used three performance measures in the Management Objective Report (MOR) to assess screener and airport performance. The MOR included three measures that assessed screener performance, including TIP detection rates, Advanced Imaging Technology checkpoint utilization, and layered security effectiveness. For more on these performance measures, see GAO-13-208.

the Scorecard included the TIP detection rate, and the number of negative and positive customer contacts made to the TSA Contact Center through e-mails or phone calls per 100,000 passengers screened, among others.[21]

We also reported in December 2012 that TSA had conducted or commissioned prior reports comparing the cost and performance of SPP and non-SPP airports. For example, in 2004 and 2007, TSA commissioned reports prepared by private consultants, while in 2008 the agency issued its own report comparing the performance of SPP and non-SPP airports.[22] Generally, these reports found that SPP airports performed at a level equal to or better than non-SPP airports. However, TSA officials stated at the time that they did not plan to conduct similar analyses in the future, and instead, they were using across-the-board mechanisms of both private and federal screeners, such as the Scorecard, to assess screener performance across all commercial airports.

In addition to using the Scorecard, we found that TSA conducted monthly contractor performance management reviews (PMR) at each SPP airport to assess the contractor's performance against the standards set in each SPP contract. The PMRs included 10 performance measures, including some of the same measures included in the Scorecard, such as TIP detection rates and recertification pass rates, for which TSA establishes acceptable quality levels of performance. Failure to meet the acceptable quality levels of performance could result in corrective actions or termination of the contract.

However, as we reported in December 2012, the Scorecard and PMR did not provide a complete picture of screener performance at SPP airports because, while both mechanisms provided a snapshot of private screener

---

[21]The TSA Contact Center handles these customer contacts for all of TSA, not only those related to passenger and baggage screening. For more on the Scorecard performance measures, see GAO-13-208.

[22]Bearing Point, Inc, *Private Screening Operations Performance Evaluation Report* (Apr. 16, 2004); Catapult Consultants, LLC*, Private Screening Operations: Business Case Analysis, Transportation Security Administration, Screening Partnership Program* (Arlington: VA: Dec.14, 2007); and TSA, *A Report on SPP Airport Cost and Performance Analysis and Comparison to Business Case Analysis Finding* (Arlington, VA: Feb. 1, 2008).

performance at each SPP airport, this information was not summarized for the SPP as a whole or across years, which made it difficult to identify changes in performance. Further, neither the Scorecard nor the PMR provided information on performance in prior years or controlled for variables that TSA officials explained to us were important when comparing private and federal screener performance, such as the type of X-ray machine used for TIP detection rates. We concluded that monitoring private screener performance in comparison with federal screener performance was consistent with the statutory requirement that TSA enter into a contract with a private screening company only if the Administrator determines and certifies to Congress that the level of screening services and protection provided at an airport under a contract will be equal to or greater than the level that would be provided at the airport by federal government personnel.[23] Therefore, we recommended that TSA develop a mechanism to regularly monitor private versus federal screener performance, which would better position the agency to know whether the level of screening services and protection provided at SPP airports continues to be equal to or greater than the level provided at non-SPP airports.

TSA concurred with our recommendation, and has taken actions to address it. Specifically, in January 2013, TSA issued its first *SPP Annual Report*. The report highlights the accomplishments of the SPP during fiscal year 2012 and provides an overview and discussion of private versus federal screener cost and performance. The report also describes the criteria TSA used to select certain performance measures and reasons why other measures were not selected for its comparison of private and federal screener performance. The report compares the performance of SPP airports with the average performance of airports in their respective category, as well as the average performance for all airports, for three performance measures: TIP detection rates, recertification pass rates, and PACE evaluation results. Further, in September 2013, the TSA Assistant Administrator for Security Operations signed an operations directive that provides internal guidance for preparing the *SPP Annual Report*, including the requirement that the SPP PMO must annually verify that the level of screening services and protection provided at SPP airports is equal to or greater than the level

---

[23]See 49 U.S.C. § 44920(d) (providing further that private screening companies must be owned and controlled by a citizen of the United States, subject to a waiver of this requirement by the TSA Administrator in certain circumstances).

that would be provided by federal screeners. We believe that these actions address the intent of our recommendation and should better position TSA to determine whether the level of screening services and protection provided at SPP airports continues to be equal to or greater than the level provided at non-SPP airports. Further, these actions could also assist TSA in identifying performance changes that could lead to improvements in the program and inform decision making regarding potential expansion of the SPP.

Chairman Mica, Ranking Member Connolly, and members of the subcommittee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have at this time.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

For questions about this statement, please contact Jennifer Grover at (202) 512-7141 or GroverJ@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. Individuals making key contributions to this statement include Glenn Davis (Assistant Director), Stanley Kostyla, Brendan Kretzschmar, Thomas Lombardi, Erin O'Brien, and Jessica Orr. Key contributors for the previous work that this testimony is based on are listed in the product.