



## Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on  
Transportation Security, Committee on  
Homeland Security, House of  
Representatives

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# EXPLOSIVES DETECTION CANINES

## TSA Has Taken Steps to Analyze Canine Team Data and Assess the Effectiveness of Passenger Screening Canines

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

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-695T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Transportation Security, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

TSA has implemented a multilayered system composed of people, processes, and technology to protect the nation's transportation system. One of TSA's security layers is NEDCTP, composed of over 800 deployed explosives detection canine teams, including PSC teams trained to detect explosives on passengers.

This testimony addresses the extent to which TSA has (1) regularly analyzed data to identify program trends and areas working well or in need of corrective action, and (2) comprehensively assessed the effectiveness of PSCs, and coordinated with stakeholders to deploy PSC teams to the highest-risk airports and utilize them as intended. This statement is based on a report GAO issued in January 2013 and selected updates obtained from October 2013 through June 2014. For the selected updates, GAO reviewed TSA documentation, including the results of PSC effectiveness assessments, 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 videos of GAO's June 2012 observation of PSC teams. [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#).  
View [GAO-14-695T](#). For more information, contact Jennifer Grover at (202) 512-7141 or [GroverJ@gao.gov](mailto:GroverJ@gao.gov).

June 24, 2014

## EXPLOSIVES DETECTION CANINES

### TSA Has Taken Steps to Analyze Canine Team Data and Assess the Effectiveness of Passenger Screening Canines

#### What GAO Found

In January 2013, GAO reported that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) collected and used key canine program data in support of its National Explosives Detection Canine Team Program (NEDCTP), but could better analyze these data to identify program trends. For example, GAO found that in reviewing short notice assessments (covert tests), TSA did not analyze the results beyond the pass and fail rates. Therefore, TSA was missing an opportunity to determine if there were any search areas or types of explosives in which canine teams were more effective compared with others, and what, if any, training may be needed to mitigate deficiencies. GAO recommended that TSA regularly analyze available data to identify program trends and areas that are working well and those in need of corrective action to guide program resources and activities. TSA concurred and has taken actions that address the intent of our recommendation. For example, in the event a team fails a short notice assessment, TSA now requires that canine team supervisors complete an analysis of the team's training records to identify an explanation for the failure.

In January 2013, GAO found that TSA began deploying passenger screening canine (PSC) teams—teams of canines trained to detect explosives being carried or worn on a person—in April 2011 prior to determining the teams' operational effectiveness and where within an airport PSC teams would be most effectively utilized. GAO recommended that TSA expand and complete testing to assess the effectiveness of PSCs and conventional canines (trained to detect explosives in stationary objects) in all airport areas deemed appropriate prior to making additional PSC deployments. This would help (1) determine whether PSCs are effective at screening passengers, and resource expenditures for PSC training are warranted, and (2) inform decisions regarding the type of canine team to deploy and where to optimally deploy such teams. TSA concurred and has taken steps to address the recommendation, but additional action is needed. Specifically, TSA launched a PSC training and assessment initiative and determined PSCs to be most effective when working at the airport checkpoint, but TSA does not plan to conduct a comparison of PSC teams with conventional canine teams as GAO recommended. In January 2013, GAO also found that TSA's 2012 Strategic Framework calls for the deployment of PSC teams based on risk; however, airport stakeholder concerns related to the composition and capabilities of PSC teams resulted in the teams not being deployed to the highest-risk airports. GAO recommended that if PSCs are determined to provide an enhanced security benefit compared with conventional canine teams, TSA should coordinate with airport stakeholders to deploy future PSC teams to the highest-risk airports. TSA concurred and has taken steps to address the recommendation. Specifically, the PSC teams for which TSA had funding and not already deployed to a specific airport at the time GAO's report was issued have been deployed to, or allocated to, the highest-risk airports.

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Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Richmond, and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss our work on the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) National Explosives Detection Canine Team Program (NEDCTP). Within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), TSA is the primary federal agency responsible for security of the nation's transportation system. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, TSA has implemented a multilayered system of security composed of people, processes, and technology to protect the transportation system. One of TSA's security layers is NEDCTP, composed of over 800 explosives detection canine teams—a canine paired with a handler—aimed at deterring and detecting the use of explosive devices in the U.S. transportation system.<sup>1</sup>

Through NEDCTP, TSA trains, deploys, and certifies explosives detection canine teams. The program began under the Federal Aviation Administration in 1972 as a partnership with state and local law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction over airports by pairing law enforcement officer (LEO) handlers with conventional canines trained to detect explosives in objects (e.g., baggage and vehicles). In accordance with the Aviation and Transportation Security Act, which established TSA, the transfer of the canine program from the Federal Aviation Administration to TSA was accomplished in March 2003.<sup>2</sup> TSA subsequently expanded the program beyond airports to other transportation modes, including mass transit, and in January 2008, further expanded the program to include civilian transportation security inspector (TSI) canine teams responsible for screening air cargo. In 2011, TSA again expanded the program by deploying TSI handlers to airports with passenger screening canines (PSC)—conventional canines also trained to detect explosives being carried by or worn on a person.

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<sup>1</sup>NEDCTP is located within TSA's Office of Security Operations.

<sup>2</sup>Enacted in November 2001, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act established, within the Department of Transportation, TSA as the agency responsible for securing the nation's transportation systems. See Pub. L. No. 107-71, § 101(a), 115 Stat. 597 (2001). The Homeland Security Act of 2002 subsequently transferred TSA to the newly established Department of Homeland Security. See Pub. L. No. 107-296, § 403, 116 Stat. 2135, 2178 (2002).

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My testimony today addresses the extent to which TSA has (1) regularly analyzed data to identify program trends and areas working well or in need of corrective action, and (2) comprehensively assessed the effectiveness of PSCs, and coordinated with stakeholders to deploy PSC teams to the highest-risk airports and utilize them as intended. This statement is based on our January 2013 report and includes selected updates on the status of TSA's efforts to implement the recommendations in that report.<sup>3</sup> The report cited in this statement provides detailed information on our scope and methodology. To update our work, we obtained related documentation from TSA from October 2013 through June 2014, including reports used by NEDCTP to monitor canine team training minute requirements, results of PSC effectiveness assessments, and PSC deployment schedules. We also interviewed agency officials in June 2014 on the progress made by TSA to implement the recommendations in our January 2013 report. The work upon which this statement is based was conducted 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.

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## Background

NEDCTP's mission is to deter and detect the introduction of explosive devices into the transportation system. As of June 2014, NEDCTP has deployed 802 of 985 canine teams for which it is able to fund across the transportation system.<sup>4</sup> Table 1 shows the number of canine teams by type for which funding is available, as well as describes their roles, responsibilities, and costs to TSA. There are four types of LEO teams: aviation, mass transit, maritime, and multimodal, and three types of TSI teams: air cargo, multimodal, and PSC.

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<sup>3</sup>GAO, *TSA Explosives Detection Canine Program: Actions Needed to Analyze Data and Ensure Canine Teams Are Effectively Utilized*, [GAO-13-239](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2013). This is a public version of a sensitive report that we issued in December 2012. Information TSA deemed Sensitive Security Information was redacted.

<sup>4</sup>NEDCTP has not deployed the remaining 183 canine teams.

**Table 1: Total Number and Federal Costs of Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Canine Teams by Type of Team**

| Type of canine team                                | Number of teams for which funding is available <sup>a</sup> | Description of roles and responsibilities                                                                                                                                                                                                                | TSA start-up costs <sup>b</sup> | TSA annual costs <sup>b</sup> |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Law enforcement officer (LEO): aviation            | 511                                                         | Patrol airport terminals, including ticket counters, curbside areas, and secured areas; respond to calls to search unattended items, such as vehicles and baggage; screen air cargo; and serve as general deterrents to would-be terrorists or criminals | \$94,000                        | \$63,000                      |
| LEO: mass transit                                  | 131                                                         | Patrol mass transit terminals; search platforms, railcars, and buses; respond to calls to search unattended items, such as baggage; and serve as general deterrents to would-be terrorists or criminals                                                  | \$84,000                        | \$53,000                      |
| LEO: maritime                                      | 6                                                           | Conduct similar activities as LEO mass transit teams at ferry terminals                                                                                                                                                                                  | \$84,000                        | \$53,000                      |
| LEO: multimodal                                    | 27                                                          | Patrol and search transportation modes in their geographic area (e.g., aviation, mass transit, and maritime), and screen air cargo                                                                                                                       | \$94,000                        | \$53,000                      |
| Transportation security inspector (TSI): air cargo | 120                                                         | Primarily screen air cargo                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | \$218,000                       | \$159,000                     |
| TSI: multimodal                                    | 46                                                          | Patrol and search transportation modes in their geographic area (e.g., aviation, mass transit, or maritime), and screen air cargo                                                                                                                        | \$218,000                       | \$159,000                     |
| TSI: passenger screening canines                   | 144                                                         | Search for explosives odor on passengers in airport terminals                                                                                                                                                                                            | \$237,000                       | \$164,000                     |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | <b>985</b>                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                 |                               |

Source: GAO analysis of TSA data. | GAO-14-695T

<sup>a</sup>The number of teams for which funding is available is for fiscal year 2014.

<sup>b</sup>The cost data are as of June 2014, and have been rounded to the nearest thousand. Start-up costs reflect the costs incurred by TSA during the first year the canine team is deployed. Annual costs include the operations and maintenance costs incurred by TSA to keep canine teams deployed after their first year in the program.

TSA's start-up costs for LEO teams include the costs of training the canine and handler, and providing the handler's agency a stipend.<sup>5</sup> The

<sup>5</sup>The annual stipend is the federal cost share TSA provides per LEO team pursuant to a cooperative agreement between TSA and the LEO team's agency (state or local). Certain items and services are reimbursable by TSA through the stipend, including canine food and veterinary care. The LEO team's agency is responsible for any costs incurred greater than the amount covered by the stipend.

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annual costs to TSA for LEO teams reflect the amount of the stipend.<sup>6</sup> TSA's start-up and annual costs for TSI canine teams are greater than those for LEO teams, because TSI handlers are TSA employees, so the costs include the handlers' pay and benefits, service vehicles, and cell phones, among other things. PSC teams come at an increased cost to TSA compared with other TSI teams because of the additional 2 weeks of training and costs associated with providing decoys (i.e., persons pretending to be passengers who walk around an airport with explosive training aids). Of amounts appropriated in fiscal year 2014, TSA received a total of approximately \$126.3 million for its canine program.<sup>7</sup> This amount includes an additional \$1.25 million above TSA's fiscal year 2014 budget request to support not fewer than 10 more canine teams for the air cargo and aviation regulation environments.<sup>8</sup> In its fiscal year 2015 budget request, TSA is requesting approximately \$127.4 million, a \$1 million increase.<sup>9</sup>

Figure 1 shows LEO, TSI, and PSC teams performing searches in different environments.

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<sup>6</sup>The LEO aviation teams' stipends are \$10,000 more than those for other LEO teams because the teams are required to spend 25 percent of their time screening air cargo, per the cooperative agreement with TSA.

<sup>7</sup>For fiscal year 2014, TSA funds NEDCTP through three TSA activities: aviation regulation and other enforcement (aviation), surface transportation security inspectors and canines (surface), and air cargo.

<sup>8</sup>See, e.g., Explanatory Statement accompanying Pub. L. No. 113-76, Div. F, 128 Stat. 5, 247 (2014), at 32.

<sup>9</sup>In its fiscal year 2015 budget request, TSA proposes to consolidate all canine assets, including PSC teams and mass transit teams, within its Aviation Regulation and Other Enforcement account to allow TSA maximum flexibility to utilize the teams in any transportation environment as needed in response to changes in intelligence or capability requirements.

**Figure 1: Various Types of Canine Teams**



Law enforcement officer team patrolling mass transit terminal



Transportation security inspector team screening air cargo



Passenger screening canine team searching airport terminal

Source: GAO. | GAO-14-695T

Canines undergo 10 weeks of explosives detection training before being paired with a handler at TSA's Canine Training and Evaluation Section (CTES), located at Lackland Air Force Base. Conventional canine handlers attend a 10-week training course, and PSC handlers attend a 12-week training course.<sup>10</sup> Canines are paired with a LEO or TSI handler during their training course. After canine teams complete this training, and obtain initial certification, they acclimate to their home operating environment for a 30-day period. Upon completion of the acclimation period, CTES conducts a 3-day operational transitional assessment to ensure canine teams are not experiencing any performance challenges in their home operating environment. After initial certification, canine teams are evaluated on an annual basis to maintain certification. During the conventional explosives detection evaluation, canine teams must demonstrate their ability to detect all the explosive training aids the canines were trained to detect in five search areas.<sup>11</sup> The five search

<sup>10</sup>The majority of canine teams are trained by TSA's CTES. However, according to TSA officials, because of resource constraints, TSA contracted with Strijder Group K9, which subcontracted to Auburn University's Canine Detection Training Center to train some of the PSC teams.

<sup>11</sup>An explosive training aid is any explosive used to test and train a canine in explosives detection.

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areas are randomly selected among all the possible areas, but according to CTES, include the area that is most relevant to the type of canine team (e.g., teams assigned to airports will be evaluated in areas such as aircraft and cargo). Canine teams must find a certain percentage of the explosive training aids to pass their annual evaluation. In addition, a specified number of nonproductive responses (NPR)—when a canine responds to a location where no explosives odor is present—are allowed to pass an evaluation and maintain certification. After passing the conventional evaluation, PSC teams are required to undergo an additional annual evaluation that includes detecting explosives on a person, or being carried by a person. PSC teams are tested in different locations within the sterile areas and checkpoints of an airport.<sup>12</sup> A certain number of persons must be detected, and a specified number of NPRs are allowed for PSC certification.

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## TSA Has Taken Steps to Analyze Canine Team Data to Identify Program Trends

Since our January 2013 report, TSA has taken steps to analyze key data on the performance of its canine teams to better identify program trends, as we recommended. In January 2013, we reported that TSA collected and used key canine program data in its Canine Website System (CWS), a central management database, but it could better analyze these data to identify program trends. Table 2 highlights some of the key data elements included in the CWS.

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<sup>12</sup>The sterile area of an airport is the portion in an airport, defined in the airport's security program, that provides passengers access to boarding aircraft and to which the access generally is controlled by TSA through the screening of persons and property. See 49 C.F.R. § 1540.5.



**Table 2: Examples of Data Elements Recorded in the Canine Website System (CWS)**

| Data element             | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Training minutes         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Canine handlers record time spent conducting training to ensure canine teams maintain proficiency in detecting explosives odor.</li> <li>The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) requires canine teams to conduct a minimum of 240 proficiency training minutes every 4 weeks (month) and for handlers to record training minutes in the CWS within 48 hours.</li> </ul>                                 |
| Utilization minutes      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Law enforcement officer teams record time spent patrolling transportation terminals, searching for explosives odor in railcars and buses, for example, and screening air cargo.</li> <li>Transportation security inspector teams record time spent screening cargo, which is their primary responsibility.</li> <li>TSA requires canine handlers to record utilization minutes in CWS within 48 hours.</li> </ul> |
| Certification rates      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Canine Training and Evaluation Section evaluators record the results (certified<sup>a</sup> or decertified<sup>b</sup>) of annual canine team evaluations.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Short notice assessments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Field canine coordinators (FCC) administer short notice assessments—covert tests to assess canine teams’ level of operational effectiveness—on two canine teams within each participating agency they oversee each year.</li> <li>FCCs are required to document results of short notice assessments, and handlers are required to record results, in CWS.</li> </ul>                                              |
| Final canine responses   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Canine handlers record final canine responses—instances when a canine sits, indicating to its handler that it detects explosives odor.</li> <li>Canine handlers are instructed to document final canine responses in CWS and submit swab samples to TSA’s Canine Explosives Unit to be analyzed for explosives odor.</li> </ul>                                                                                   |

Source: GAO analysis of TSA documentation. | GAO-14-695T

<sup>a</sup>Certified teams are canine teams that passed their annual evaluation and are certified to search for explosives.

<sup>b</sup>Decertified teams are canine teams that failed their annual evaluation and are limited to training and providing mobile deterrence.

In January 2013, we found that NEDCTP was using CWS data to track and monitor canine teams’ performance. Specifically, field canine coordinators reviewed CWS data to determine how many training and utilization minutes canine teams conducted on a monthly basis. NEDCTP management used CWS data to determine, for example, how many canine teams were certified in detecting explosive odors, as well as the number of teams that passed short notice assessments. However, in our January 2013 report, we also found that TSA had not fully analyzed the performance data it collected in CWS to identify program trends and areas that were working well or in need of corrective action. For example:

- **Training minutes:** TSA tracked the number of training minutes canine teams conducted on a monthly basis, as well as the types of explosives and search areas used when training, to ensure teams maintained their proficiency in detecting explosive training aids. However, we found that TSA did not analyze training minute data over

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time (from month to month) and therefore was unable to determine trends related to canine teams' compliance with the requirement. On the basis of our analysis of TSA's data, we determined that some canine teams were repeatedly not in compliance with TSA's 240-minute training requirement, in some cases for 6 months or more in a 1-year time period.

- Utilization minutes: We found that TSA collected and analyzed data monthly on the amount of cargo TSI air cargo canine teams screened in accordance with the agency's requirement. However, it was unclear how the agency used this information to identify trends to guide longer-term future program efforts and activities, since our analysis of TSA's cargo screening data from September 2011 through July 2012 showed that TSI air cargo teams nationwide generally exceeded their monthly requirement. We concluded that TSA could increase the percentage of cargo it required TSI canine teams to screen.
- Certification rates: We found that TSA tracked the number of certified and decertified canine teams, but was unable to analyze these data to identify trends in certification rates because these data were not consistently tracked and recorded prior to 2011. Specifically, we could not determine what, if any, variances existed in the certification rates among LEO and TSI teams over time because CTES reported it was unable to provide certification rates by type of canine team for calendar years 2008 through 2010. According to CTES, the agency recognized the deficiency and was in the process of implementing procedures to address data collection, tracking, and record-keeping issues.
- Short notice assessments (covert tests): We found that when TSA was performing short notice assessments (prior to their suspension in May 2012), it was not analyzing the results beyond the pass and fail rates.<sup>13</sup> We concluded that without conducting the assessments and analyzing the results of these tests to determine if there were any search areas or type of explosives in which canine teams were more effective compared with others, and what, if any, training may have been needed to mitigate deficiencies, TSA was missing an opportunity to fully utilize the results.

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<sup>13</sup>TSA suspended the short notice assessments because of FCC staffing shortages.

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- Final canine responses: Our analysis of final canine responses and data on corresponding swab samples used to verify the presence of explosives odor revealed that canine teams were not submitting swab samples to NEDCTP's Canine Explosives Unit (CEU). Specifically, we determined that the number of swab samples sent by canine handlers to CEU for scientific review was far lower than the number of final canine responses recorded in CWS. We concluded that without the swab samples, TSA was not able to more accurately determine the extent to which canine teams were effectively detecting explosive materials in real-world scenarios.

In January 2013, we recommended that TSA regularly analyze available data to identify program trends and areas that are working well and those in need of corrective action to guide program resources and activities. These analyses could include, but not be limited to, analyzing and documenting trends in proficiency training minutes, canine utilization, results of short notice assessments and final canine responses, performance differences between LEO and TSI canine teams, as well as an assessment of the optimum location and number of canine teams that should be deployed to secure the U.S. transportation system. TSA concurred with our recommendation and has taken actions to address it. Specifically, TSA is monitoring canine teams' training minutes over time by producing annual reports. TSA also reinstated short notice assessments in July 2013, and in the event a team fails, the FCC completes a report that includes an analysis of the team's training records to identify an explanation for the failure. In April 2013, TSA reminded canine handlers of the requirement to submit swab samples of their canines' final responses, and reported that the number of samples submitted that same month, increased by 450 percent, when compared with sample submissions in April 2012. CEU is producing reports on the results of its analysis of the swab samples for the presence of explosives odor. In June 2014, TSA officials told us that in March 2014, NEDCTP stood up a new office, known as the Performance Measurement Section, to perform analyses of canine team data. We believe that these actions address the intent of our recommendation and could better position TSA to identify program trends to better target resources and activities based on what is working well and what may be in need of corrective action.

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**TSA Has Conducted  
Additional PSC Team  
Effectiveness  
Assessments and  
Deployed Some  
Teams to Highest-  
Risk Airports, but  
Additional Actions Are  
Needed**

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**TSA Has Conducted  
Additional PSC Team  
Effectiveness  
Assessments, but Has Not  
Compared PSC Teams  
with Conventional Canine  
Teams**

In our January 2013 report, we found that TSA began deploying PSC teams in April 2011 prior to determining the teams' operational effectiveness. However, in June 2012, the DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T) and TSA began conducting effectiveness assessments to help demonstrate the effectiveness of PSC teams.<sup>14</sup> On the basis of these assessments, DHS S&T and TSA's NEDCTP recommended that the assessment team conduct additional testing and that additional training and guidance be provided to canine teams. See the hyperlink in the note for figure 2 for videos of training exercises at one airport showing instances when PSC teams detected, and failed to detect, explosives odor. In January 2013, we concluded that TSA could have benefited from completing effectiveness assessments of PSCs before deploying them on a nationwide basis to determine whether they are an effective method of screening passengers in the U.S. airport environment.

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<sup>14</sup>S&T is the primary research and development arm of DHS and manages science and technology research for the department's components, such as TSA.

Figure 2: Video Stills Showing Passenger Screening Canine (PSC) Teams Training in Airport Terminal, June 2012



Source: GAO. | GAO-14-695T

Note: To view the full videos, please click on hyperlink to view [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).

We also reported in January 2013 that TSA had not completed an assessment to determine where within the airport PSC teams would be most effectively utilized, but rather TSA leadership focused on initially deploying PSC teams to a single location within the airport—the sterile area—because it thought it would be the best way to foster stakeholders', specifically airport operators' and law enforcement agencies', acceptance of the teams. Stakeholders were resistant to the deployment of PSC teams because they have civilian handlers, and TSA's response resolution protocols do not require the teams to be accompanied by a law enforcement officer.<sup>15</sup> According to TSA's Assistant Administrator for the

<sup>15</sup>Unlike LEOs, TSIs (PSC handlers) are unarmed civilians with no authority to take law enforcement action (e.g., arrest or detain). The response resolution protocols require the handler to be accompanied by two additional personnel that may, but not always, include a law enforcement officer.

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Office of Security Operations, to alleviate airport stakeholders' concerns regarding TSA's response resolution protocols, the agency initially deployed PSC teams to the sterile areas, thereby enabling TSA to gather data on the value of PSC teams in the airport environment while reducing the likelihood of a final response from a PSC, since an individual has already passed through several layers of screening when entering the sterile area. However, aviation stakeholders we interviewed raised concerns about this deployment strategy, stating that PSC teams would be more effectively utilized in non-sterile areas of the airport, such as curbside or in the lobby areas. TSA subsequently deployed PSC teams to the passenger screening checkpoints. However, DHS S&T did not plan to assess the effectiveness of PSCs on the public side, beyond the checkpoint, since TSA was not planning to deploy PSCs to the public side of the airport when DHS S&T designed its test plan. In January 2013, we concluded that comprehensive effectiveness assessments that include a comparison of PSC teams in both the sterile and public areas of the airport could help TSA determine if it is beneficial to deploy PSCs to the public side of airports, in addition to or in lieu of the sterile area and checkpoint.

During the June 2012 assessment of PSC teams' effectiveness, TSA conducted one of the search exercises with three conventional canine teams. Although this assessment was not intended to be included as part of DHS S&T's and TSA's formal assessment of PSC effectiveness, the results of the assessment suggested, and TSA officials and DHS S&T's Canine Explosives Detection Project Manager agreed, that a systematic assessment of PSCs with conventional canines could provide TSA with information to determine whether PSCs provide an enhanced security benefit compared with conventional LEO aviation canine teams that have already been deployed to airport terminals. In January 2013, we concluded that an assessment would help clarify whether additional investments for PSC training are warranted. We also concluded that since PSC teams are trained in both conventional and passenger screening methods, TSA could decide to convert existing PSC teams to conventional canine teams, thereby limiting the additional resource investments associated with training and maintaining the new PSC teams.

We recommended that TSA expand and complete testing, in conjunction with DHS S&T, to assess the effectiveness of PSCs and conventional canines in all airport areas deemed appropriate prior to making additional PSC deployments to help (1) determine whether PSCs are effective at screening passengers, and resource expenditures for PSC training are

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warranted, and (2) inform decisions regarding the type of canine team to deploy and where to optimally deploy such teams within airports. TSA concurred and has taken some actions to address our recommendation, but further action is needed to fully address it. Specifically, in June 2014, TSA reported that through its PSC Focused Training and Assessment Initiative, a two-cycle assessment to establish airport-specific optimal working areas, assess team performance, and train teams on best practices, it had assessed PSC teams deployed to 27 airports, cumulating in a total of 1,048 tests. On the basis of these tests, TSA determined that PSC teams are effective and should be deployed at the checkpoint queue. In February 2014, TSA launched a third PSC assessment cycle to determine how PSCs' effectiveness changes over time in order to determine their optimal duration time when working the checkpoint queue (i.e., how many minutes they can work and continue to be effective).

Although TSA has taken steps to determine whether PSC teams are effective and where in the airport environment to optimally deploy such teams, as of June 2014, TSA has not compared the effectiveness of PSCs and conventional canines in order to determine if the greater cost of training canines in the passenger screening method is warranted. According to TSA, the agency does not plan to include conventional canine teams in PSC assessments because conventional canines have not been through the process used with PSC canines to assess their temperament and behavior when working in proximity to people. While we recognize TSA's position that half of deployed conventional canines are of a breed not accepted for use in the PSC program, other conventional canines are suitable breeds, and have been paired with LEO aviation handlers working in proximity with people since they patrol airport terminals, including ticket counters and curbside areas. We continue to believe that TSA should conduct an assessment to determine whether conventional canines are as effective detecting explosives odor on passengers when compared with PSC teams working in the checkpoint queue. As we reported, since PSC teams are trained in both conventional and passenger screening methods, TSA could decide to convert existing PSC teams to conventional canine teams, thereby limiting the additional resource investments associated with training and maintaining PSC teams.

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## TSA Deployed Some PSC Teams to Highest-Risk Airports

In our January 2013 report, we found that TSA's 2012 Strategic Framework calls for the deployment of PSC teams based on risk; however, airport stakeholder concerns about the appropriateness of TSA's response resolution protocols for these teams resulted in PSC

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teams not being deployed to the highest-risk airports. TSA officials stated that PSC teams were not deployed to the highest-risk airports for various reasons, including concerns from an airport law enforcement association about TSA's decision to deploy PSC teams with civilian TSI handlers and the appropriateness of TSA's response resolution protocols. These protocols require the canine handler to be accompanied by two additional personnel that may, but not always, include a law enforcement officer. According to representatives from an airport law enforcement association, these protocols are not appropriate for a suicide bombing attempt requiring an immediate law enforcement response. TSA's decision to deploy PSC teams only to airports where they would be willingly accepted by stakeholders resulted in PSC teams not being deployed to the highest-risk airports on its high-risk list. Moreover, PSC teams that were deployed to high-risk airports, specifically two airports we visited, were not being used for passenger screening because TSA and the local law enforcement agencies had not reached agreement on the PSC response resolution protocols.

We recommended that if PSCs are determined to provide an enhanced security benefit, TSA should coordinate with airport stakeholders to deploy future PSC teams to the highest-risk airports, and ensure that deployed PSC teams are utilized as intended, consistent with its statutory authority to provide for the screening of passengers and their property. TSA concurred with our recommendation, and has taken action to address it. Specifically, as of June 2014, the PSC teams for which TSA had funding and not already deployed to a specific airport at the time our report was issued have been deployed to, or allocated to, the highest-risk airports. According to TSA, it was successful in deploying PSC teams to airports where they were previously declined by aviation stakeholders for various reasons. For example, TSA officials explained that stakeholders have realized that PSCs are an effective means for detecting explosives odor, and no checkpoints have closed because of a nonproductive response. PSCs also help reduce wait times at airport checkpoints because PSC teams are one method by which TSA can operate Managed Inclusion—a tool that allows passengers who have not, for example, enrolled in TSA Pre✓™ to access to Pre✓™ screening lanes.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Through the TSA Pre✓™ program, passengers who experience expedited screening may not have to remove their shoes; may leave their liquids and gels and laptops in carry-on baggage; and are not required to divest light outerwear, jackets, or belts when passing through screening checkpoints. We have an ongoing review of the TSA Pre✓™ program, including Managed Inclusion, and anticipate issuing a report in September 2014.



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According to TSA, PSC teams provide an added layer of security, making it possible for TSA to provide expedited screening to passengers who have not enrolled in TSA Pre✓™ and therefore have not had a background check.<sup>17</sup> In November 2013, TSA also reported it was making progress in working with stakeholders to allow PSC teams to work at checkpoints at airports where PSC teams were not previously performing passenger screening, but rather were training and screening air cargo. In June 2014, TSA officials reported that of all the airports where PSC teams had been deployed, all but one airport agreed to allow TSA to conduct screening of individuals at passenger screening checkpoint queues. We believe that these actions address the intent of our recommendation, contingent upon TSA comparing PSC teams with conventional canine teams.

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Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Richmond, 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.

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## GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

For questions about this statement, please contact Jennifer Grover at (202) 512-7141 or [GroverJ@gao.gov](mailto: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 Chris Ferencik (Assistant Director), Chuck Bausell, Lisa Canini, Josh Diosomito, Michele Fejfar, Eric Hauswirth, Richard Hung, Thomas Lombardi, Jessica Orr, and Michelle Woods. Key contributors to the previous work that this testimony is based on are listed in the report.

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<sup>17</sup>For Pre✓™ applicants, TSA conducts a background check that includes checks against law enforcement, immigration, and intelligence databases, including a fingerprint-based criminal history records check conducted through the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The results are used by TSA to decide if an individual poses a sufficiently low risk to transportation or national security to participate in Pre✓™.

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