

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-790T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittees on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation and Border and Maritime Security, Committees on Transportation and Infrastructure and Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. economy is dependent on the expeditious flow of millions of tons of cargo each day through the global supply chain—the flow of goods from manufacturers to retailers. Criminal or terrorist attacks using cargo shipments can cause disruptions to the supply chain and can limit global economic growth and productivity. Within DHS, CBP has responsibility for administering maritime cargo security measures and reducing the vulnerabilities associated with the supply chain. CBP has developed a layered security strategy that focuses its limited resources on targeting and examining high-risk cargo shipments that could pose a risk while allowing other cargo shipments to proceed without unduly disrupting commerce arriving in the United States.

This statement discusses the progress and challenges associated with CBP's implementation of initiatives and programs responsible for enhancing the security of the global supply chain. The statement is based on reports and testimonies GAO issued from April 2008 through January 2015 related to maritime cargo security—with selected updates on how DHS has responded to GAO's prior recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

In prior reports, GAO has made recommendations to DHS to strengthen various maritime cargo security programs. DHS generally concurred with the recommendations and has taken actions, or has actions under way, to address many of these recommendations.

View [GAO-16-790T](#). For more information, contact Jennifer A. Grover at (202) 512-7141 or groverj@gao.gov.

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MARITIME SECURITY

Progress and Challenges in Implementing Maritime Cargo Security Programs

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) have made substantial progress in implementing initiatives and programs that, collectively, have enhanced cargo security, but some challenges remain. Examples of progress and challenges are discussed below.

Risk Assessments of Cargo Shipments. In January 2015, GAO found that CBP did not have accurate data on the number and disposition of each high-risk shipment scheduled to arrive in the United States. Specifically, CBP's data overstated the number of high-risk shipments, including those that appeared not to be examined or waived in accordance with CBP policy. CBP officers inconsistently applied criteria to make some waiver decisions and incorrectly documented waiver reasons. GAO recommended that CBP define waiver categories and disseminate policy on issuing waivers. In response, CBP issued a new policy that includes criteria for waiving examinations of high-risk shipments and developed a new process for recording waivers and issued a memorandum.

Partnerships with Foreign Governments. In September 2013, GAO reported that CBP had not regularly assessed foreign ports for risks to cargo since 2005. GAO recommended that DHS periodically assess the security risks from ports that ship cargo to the United States and use the results to inform whether changes need to be made to Container Security Initiative (CSI) ports. DHS concurred with the recommendation and CBP has since developed a port risk matrix and priority map to be used to help assess whether changes need to be made to CSI ports. These tools are to be updated yearly and can be updated more frequently based on significant changes, emerging threats, and intelligence. These tools should assist CBP in ensuring it is allocating its resources to provide the greatest coverage of U.S.-bound high-risk cargo.

In October 2009, GAO reported challenges to scanning 100 percent of U.S.-bound cargo at foreign ports. DHS officials acknowledged that most, if not all foreign ports, would not be able to meet the July 2012 target date for scanning all U.S.-bound cargo, and DHS would need to issue extensions to allow the continued flow of commerce and remain in compliance with statutory requirements. Although the Secretary of Homeland Security has issued three 2-year extensions for implementing the 100 percent scanning mandate, which have extended the deadline to July 2018, DHS has not yet identified a viable solution to meet the requirement.

Partnerships with the Trade Industry. Through the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) program, CBP officials work with member companies to validate the security of their supply chains in exchange for benefits, such as reduced scrutiny of their shipments. In April 2008, GAO found, among other things, that CBP lacked a systematic process to ensure that members take appropriate actions in response to security validations. GAO recommended that CBP document key data elements needed to track compliance. CBP has since implemented a process to ensure that C-TPAT validation report recommendations are implemented. GAO is currently reviewing the C-TPAT program, to include an assessment of CBP's ability to meet its security validation responsibilities.