



Highlights of [GAO-03-688](#), a report to Congressional Requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

In March 2001, the Department of Justice Office of Inspector General reported that the Immigration and Naturalization Service could not account for over 500 of its firearms. Furthermore, in July 2001, the Federal Bureau of Investigation disclosed that 449 of its firearms were lost or stolen. Given the possible threat that lost, stolen, or missing firearms poses to the public, GAO assessed (1) the consistency of federal agencies' firearms controls with federal internal control standards and related criteria; and (2) compliance by Justice and Treasury agencies with established firearms controls and improvements made to strengthen and enforce controls.

## What GAO Recommends

To provide better assurance that firearms are safeguarded from loss, theft, or misuse, Department officials should reassess, and modify if necessary, existing firearms controls based on generally accepted internal control standards. The agencies should also document firearms controls in agency policies and procedures so they can be consistently understood and applied.

Officials generally agreed with GAO's findings. Two agencies agreed with our recommendation, and three said they had taken actions consistent with the recommendation. A fourth agency expressed concern about GAO's recommendation, saying its existing controls were effective.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-688](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-688).

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (212) 512-8777 or [berrickc@gao.gov](mailto:berrickc@gao.gov).

# FIREARMS CONTROLS

## Federal Agencies Have Firearms Controls, but Could Strengthen Controls in Key Areas

### What GAO Found

GAO found that all 18 federal agencies reviewed, which accounted for over 95 percent of federal officers and agents authorized to carry firearms, had policies and procedures for controlling and safeguarding firearms that were consistent with federal internal control standards and related criteria. However, agencies could strengthen their controls in key areas that have been consistently recognized as important for effective inventory management. These areas include

- recording and tracking firearms inventory data;
- maintaining, controlling, and accounting for firearms inventories;
- ensuring personal and supervisory accountability for firearms; and
- requiring investigations, and discipline when deemed appropriate, for individuals determined not to have followed firearms accountability procedures.

Although agencies established policies and procedures to control firearms, audits conducted by the Departments of Justice and the Treasury found that agencies did not always follow established procedures, or implement procedures, for conducting periodic inventories, reporting and investigating missing firearms, and securing firearms inventories. Since these weaknesses were identified, we found that agencies have implemented, or are in the process of implementing, actions to strengthen their firearms controls.

In addition, 15 of the 18 federal agencies GAO reviewed reported a total of 1,012 firearms as lost, stolen, or otherwise not in their possession between September 30, 1998 and July 2002, further indicating the need for stronger controls. Of these firearms, 188 were recovered, leaving 824 firearms still missing. While we could not determine the exact percentage of agency firearms that were reported lost, stolen, or missing, it appears that these firearms generally accounted for less than 1 percent of agencies' total firearms inventories. In independent reviews of selected missing firearms cases, the Departments of Justice and the Treasury identified instances of firearms recovered in connection with criminal activity or during the course of criminal investigations.

### Federal Agencies with Personnel Authorized to Carry Firearms Included in GAO's Review

Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms	National Institutes of Health
Bureau of Engraving and Printing	National Park Service
Drug Enforcement Administration	U.S. Customs Service
Federal Bureau of Investigation	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Federal Bureau of Prisons	U.S. Marshals Service
Federal Emergency Management Agency	U.S. Mint
Federal Protective Service	U.S. Postal Inspection Service
Immigration and Naturalization Service	U.S. Secret Service
Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation	Department of Veterans Affairs

Source: GAO survey of agencies' data.