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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-29](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

While aviation accidents in the United States are relatively infrequent, recent incidents have heightened concerns about safety on airport runways and ramps. As the nation's aviation system becomes more crowded every day, increased congestion at airports may exacerbate ground safety concerns. To safely handle the anticipated larger volumes of air traffic, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is implementing the Next Generation Air Transportation System (NextGen) to better manage air traffic both in the air and on the ground. GAO was asked to evaluate (1) the progress being made in addressing runway safety and what additional measures, if any, could be taken and (2) the factors affecting progress in improving ramp safety and what is being done by FAA and others to address those factors. We reviewed runway and ramp safety data, interviewed agency officials and industry stakeholders, and surveyed experts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FAA take several measures to enhance runway and ramp safety, such as updating its national runway safety plan, collecting data on runway overruns, and working with OSHA and industry to collect and analyze better information on ramp accidents. DOT agreed to consider the report's recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-29](#). For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham, Ph.D. at (202) 512-2834 or dillingham@gao.gov.

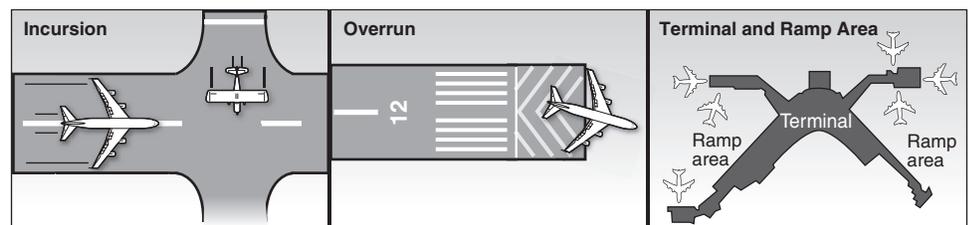
AVIATION RUNWAY AND RAMP SAFETY

Sustained Efforts to Address Leadership, Technology, and Other Challenges Needed to Reduce Accidents and Incidents

What GAO Found

FAA and aviation stakeholders have taken steps to address runway and ramp safety, including deploying and testing technology designed to prevent runway incursions, which occur when aircraft enter the runway without authorization, and overruns, which occur when aircraft run off the ends of runways; helping to change airport layout, markings, signage, and lighting; and providing training for pilots and air traffic controllers. In addition, FAA has made progress in addressing runway overruns and reports that 70 percent of the runways at U.S. commercial airports substantially comply with runway safety area standards, up from 55 percent in 2000. However, the rate of runway incursions has not decreased over the last 5 years. In addition, FAA has not prepared a national runway safety plan since 2002, despite agency policy that it be updated every 2 to 3 years, resulting in uncoordinated efforts within the agency. Runway safety technology currently being installed is experiencing some operational difficulties with its alerting function, while additional technology to prevent runway collisions is years away from deployment. FAA also lacks data on runway overruns that could be used to analyze the causes and circumstances of such incidents. Air traffic controller fatigue, which may result from regularly working overtime, continues to be a matter of concern for the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), which investigates transportation accidents, and other aviation stakeholders.

Efforts to improve safety in airport ramp areas, where departing and arriving aircraft are serviced by baggage, catering, and fueling personnel, are hindered by a lack of complete accident data and standards for ground handling, but the aviation industry is taking steps to address these problems with the goal of reducing ramp accidents. Data from 2001 through 2006 from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which investigates occupational accidents, NTSB, and FAA indicated that these agencies had investigated 29 fatal ramp accidents during that time. The majority of the fatalities in these accidents were ramp workers. GAO found no comprehensive nonfatal injury data on ramp accidents and neither federal nor industrywide standards for ramp operations. The federal government has generally taken an indirect role overseeing ramp safety; airlines and airports typically control the ramp areas using their own policies and procedures. Meanwhile, some airlines and airports have initiated their own efforts to address ramp safety, and aviation organizations have begun collecting ramp accident data.



Source: Lincoln Laboratory, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and GAO.