



Highlights of [GAO-08-491T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Energy and Environment, House Committee on Science and Technology

## Why GAO Did This Study

The National Weather Service (NWS), an agency under the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), provides staff on-site at each of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) en route centers—the facilities that control high-altitude flight outside the airport tower and terminal areas. This group of NWS meteorologists provides air traffic managers with forecasts and briefings on regional conditions such as turbulence and icing. Over the last few years, FAA has been exploring options for enhancing the efficiency of the aviation weather services provided by these NWS meteorologists. In late December 2007, FAA delivered revised requirements and associated performance measures to NWS to improve these services.

GAO was asked to summarize key segments of its report being released today, including its assessment of NWS and FAA efforts to ensure the quality of aviation weather services at en route centers, and its recommendations to improve these efforts. In addition, GAO was asked to provide an update on FAA's recent efforts to establish aviation weather requirements and performance measures, and NWS's plans for responding to these requirements. To do so, GAO summarized segments of its report, reviewed FAA's recently released requirements, and interviewed the official responsible for NWS's response.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-491T](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at 202-512-9286 or [pownerd@gao.gov](mailto:pownerd@gao.gov).

## AVIATION WEATHER

### Services at Key Aviation Facilities Lack Performance Measures, but Improvement Efforts Are Under Way

#### What GAO Found

Although interagency agreements between NWS and FAA state that both agencies have responsibilities for assuring and controlling the quality of aviation weather observations, neither agency consistently does so for weather products and services produced at the en route centers. Specifically, neither agency has developed and implemented performance measures and metrics, regularly evaluated weather service unit performance, or provided feedback to improve these aviation weather products and services. Because of this lack of performance tracking and oversight, NWS cannot demonstrate the quality or value of its services, and FAA cannot ensure the quality of the services it funds. Until both agencies are able to measure and ensure the quality of the aviation weather products at the en route centers, FAA may not be getting the information it needs to effectively manage air traffic.

In its report being issued today, GAO is making recommendations to the Secretaries of Commerce and Transportation to ensure that NWS and FAA develop performance measures, evaluate the services against those measures, and provide feedback to NWS. Commerce agreed with the recommendations and stated that NOAA would work with FAA to develop methods for performance monitoring and evaluation. Transportation did not agree or disagree with the recommendations, but stated that FAA's revised requirements would establish performance measures and evaluation procedures, and that FAA would negotiate with NWS to implement them.

FAA has begun to address GAO's recommendations. In late December 2007, FAA finalized its new requirements, including performance measures and methods for evaluating performance and providing feedback to NWS. In doing so, FAA provides its overall vision for aviation weather services, reiterates its need for existing products and services, provides revisions to existing requirements, and defines a new product. FAA directed NWS to respond by May 2008 and include plans in its response for three operational concepts—in its existing configuration located at the 21 en route centers, through remote services provided by a reduced number of regional facilities, and through remote services provided by a single centralized facility. FAA stated that NWS should assume a transition time of 90 days for the existing configuration, 180 days for regionalized services, and 1 year for a single facility.

NWS plans to respond to FAA by the May 2008 deadline, but FAA's estimated time frames for transitioning to a new operational concept may be overly ambitious. Given the importance of accurate and timely weather information in air traffic control, it will be important for NWS to conduct a thorough evaluation before it transitions to a new operational concept in order to ensure that there are no impacts on the continuity of air traffic operations and no degradation of weather service.