



Highlights of [GAO-08-757](#), a report to the Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

From January 2003 to September 2007, GAO testified before the Committee on three occasions to describe security vulnerabilities that terrorists could exploit to enter the country. GAO's first two testimonies focused on covert testing at ports of entry—the air, sea, and land locations where international travelers can legally enter the United States. In its third testimony, GAO focused on limited security assessments of unmanned and unmonitored border areas between land ports of entry.

GAO was asked to summarize the results of covert testing and assessment work for these three testimonies. This report discusses the results of testing at land, sea, and air ports of entry; however, the majority of GAO's work was focused on land ports of entry. The unmanned and unmonitored border areas GAO assessed were defined as locations where the government does not maintain a manned presence 24 hours per day or where there was no apparent monitoring equipment in place. GAO assessed a nonrepresentative selection of these locations and did not attempt to evaluate all potential U.S. border security vulnerabilities. Further, GAO's work was limited in scope and cannot be projected to represent systemic weaknesses.

In response to this report, DHS provided a written update on numerous border protection efforts it has taken to enhance border security since 2003. GAO did not attempt to verify the information provided by DHS, but has included the response in this report.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-757](#). For more information, contact Gregory D. Kutz at (202) 512-6722 or kutzg@gao.gov.

BORDER SECURITY

Summary of Covert Tests and Security Assessments for the Senate Committee on Finance, 2003–2007

What GAO Found

GAO investigators identified numerous border security vulnerabilities, both at ports of entry and at unmanned and unmonitored land border locations between the ports of entry. In testing ports of entry, undercover investigators carried counterfeit drivers' licenses, birth certificates, employee identification cards, and other documents, presented themselves at ports of entry and sought admittance to the United States dozens of times. They arrived in rental cars, on foot, by boat, and by airplane. They attempted to enter in four states on the northern border (Washington, New York, Michigan, and Idaho), three states on the southern border (California, Arizona, and Texas), and two other states requiring international air travel (Florida and Virginia). In nearly every case, government inspectors accepted oral assertions and counterfeit identification provided by GAO investigators as proof of U.S. citizenship and allowed them to enter the country. In total, undercover investigators made 42 crossings with a 93 percent success rate. On several occasions, while entering by foot from Mexico and by boat from Canada, investigators were not even asked to show identification. For example, at one border crossing in Texas in 2006, an undercover investigator attempted to show a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officer his counterfeit driver's license, but the officer said, "That's fine, you can go" without looking at it. As a result of these tests, GAO concluded that terrorists could use counterfeit identification to pass through most of the tested ports of entry with little chance of being detected.

In its most recent work, GAO shifted its focus from ports of entry and primarily performed limited security assessments of unmanned and unmonitored areas between ports of entry. The names of the states GAO visited for this limited security assessment have been withheld at the request of CBP. In four states along the U.S.–Canada border, GAO found state roads that were very close to the border that CBP did not appear to monitor. In three states, the proximity of the road to the border allowed investigators to cross undetected, successfully simulating the cross-border movement of radioactive materials or other contraband into the United States from Canada. For example, in one apparently unmanned, unmonitored area on the northern border, the U.S. Border Patrol was alerted to GAO's activities through the tip of an alert citizen. However, the responding U.S. Border Patrol agents were not able to locate the investigators and their simulated contraband. Also on the northern border, GAO investigators located several ports of entry in one state on the northern border that had posted daytime hours and were unmanned overnight. Investigators observed that surveillance equipment was in operation, but that the only preventive measure to stop an individual from crossing the border into the United States was a barrier across the road that could be driven around. GAO also identified potential security vulnerabilities on federally managed lands adjacent to the U.S.–Mexico border. GAO concluded that CBP faces significant challenges on the northern border, and that a determined cross-border violator would likely be able to bring radioactive materials or other contraband undetected into the United States by crossing the U.S.–Canada border at any of the assessed locations.