



Highlights of [GAO-GAO-05-677](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Concerns have arisen about whether the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is applying the Sensitive Security Information (SSI) designation consistently and appropriately. SSI is one category of “sensitive but unclassified” information—information generally restricted from public disclosure but that is not classified. GAO determined (1) TSA’s SSI designation and removal procedures, (2) TSA’s internal control procedures in place to ensure that it consistently complies with laws and regulations governing the SSI process and oversight thereof, and (3) TSA’s training to its staff that designate SSI.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct TSA to establish clear guidance and procedures for using the TSA regulations to determine what constitutes SSI; establish clear responsibility for the identification and designation of SSI information; establish internal controls monitoring compliance with its SSI regulations, policies, and procedures, and communicate that responsibility for implementing the controls throughout TSA; and provide specialized training to those making SSI designations on how information is to be identified and evaluated for SSI status. The Department of Homeland Security generally concurred with our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-677.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Laurie E. Ekstrand at (202) 512-8777 or ekstrandl@gao.gov.

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Clear Policies and Oversight Needed for Designation of Sensitive Security Information

What GAO Found

TSA does not have guidance and procedures, beyond its SSI regulations, providing criteria for determining what constitutes SSI or who can make the designation. Such guidance is required under GAO’s standards for internal controls. In addition, TSA has no policies on accounting for or tracking documents designated as SSI. As a result, TSA was unable to determine either the number of TSA employees actually designating information as SSI or the number of documents designated SSI. Further, apart from Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests or other requests for disclosure outside of TSA, there are no written policies and procedures or systematic reviews for determining if and when an SSI designation should be removed.

TSA also lacks adequate internal controls to provide reasonable assurance that its SSI designation process is being consistently applied across TSA. Specifically, TSA has not established and documented policies and internal control procedures for monitoring compliance with the regulations, policies, and procedures governing its SSI designation process, including ongoing monitoring of the process. TSA officials told us that its new SSI Program Office will ultimately be responsible for ensuring that staff are consistently applying SSI designations. This office, which was established in February 2005, will also develop and implement all TSA policy concerning SSI handling, training, and protection. More detailed information on how this office’s activities will be operationalized was not yet available. Specifically, TSA officials provided no written policies formalizing the office’s role, responsibilities, and authority.

TSA has not developed policies and procedures for providing specialized training for all of its employees making SSI designations on how information is identified and evaluated for protected status. Development of such training for SSI designations is needed to help ensure consistent implementation of the designation authority across TSA. While TSA has provided a training briefing on SSI regulations to certain staff, such as the FOIA staff, it does not have specialized training in place to instruct employees on how to consistently designate information as SSI. In addition, TSA has no written policies identifying who is responsible for ensuring that employees comply with SSI training requirements.