



Highlights of [GAO-05-466T](#), a testimony before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U. S. ted States Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has in place two programs to help address the threat posed by terrorists smuggling weapons of mass destruction (WMD) into the United States: the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT) and the Container Security Initiative (CSI). In July 2003, GAO reported that these programs had management challenges that limited their effectiveness. Given plans to expand both programs, in two recently issued reports GAO examined selected aspects of both programs' operations. This statement is a summary of those publicly available reports.

What GAO Recommends

For the C-TPAT program, GAO recommended that CBP eliminate the weaknesses in its validation process, complete its human capital plan and performance measures, and put in place internal controls for the program. For the CSI program, GAO recommended that CBP refine its staffing model to help improve targeting of shipments at CSI ports, develop minimum technical requirements for the capabilities of inspection equipment, and complete development of program measures.

CBP generally concurred with the recommendations and described corrective actions to respond to them.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-466T.

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

HOMELAND SECURITY

Key Cargo Security Programs Can Be Improved

What GAO Found

In return for committing to making improvements to the security of their shipments, C-TPAT members receive a range of benefits that may change the risk characterization of their shipments, thereby reducing the probability of extensive inspection. Before providing benefits, CBP reviews the self-reported information contained in applicants' membership agreements and security profiles. Also, CBP assesses the compliance history of importers before granting them benefits. However, CBP grants benefits before members undergo the validation process, which is CBP's method to verify that their security measures are reliable, accurate, and effective. Although CBP's goal was to validate members within 3 years, to date it has validated 11 percent of them. Further, the validation process is not rigorous, as the objectives, scope, and methodology of validations are jointly agreed upon with the member, and CBP has no written guidelines to indicate what scope of effort is adequate for the validation. Also, although CBP has recently moved to a risk-based approach to selecting members for validation, it has not determined the number and types of validations that are needed to manage security risks or the CBP staff required to complete them. Further, CBP has not developed a comprehensive set of performance measures for the program, and key program decisions are not always documented and programmatic information is not updated regularly or accurately.

The CSI program is designed to target and inspect high-risk cargo containers at foreign ports before they leave for the United States. It has resulted in improved information sharing between U.S. and foreign customs operations and a heightened level of international awareness regarding securing the global shipping system. Yet, several factors limit CBP's ability to successfully target containers to determine if they are high-risk. One factor is staffing imbalances, caused by political and practical considerations, which impede CBP's targeting efforts at CSI ports. As a result, 35 percent of U.S.-bound shipments from CSI ports were not targeted and not subject to inspection overseas—the key goal of the CSI program. In addition, as of September 11, 2004, 28 percent of the containers referred to host governments for inspection were not inspected overseas for various reasons such as operational limitations. One percent of these referrals were denied by host government officials, generally because they believed the referrals were based on factors not related to security threats. For the 72 percent of referred containers that were inspected overseas, CBP officials told us that no WMD were discovered. However, the nonintrusive inspection equipment used at CSI ports varies in detection capability, and there are no minimum technical requirements for equipment used as part of CSI. As a result, CBP has limited assurance that inspections conducted under CSI are effective at detecting and identifying terrorist WMD in containers. Finally, CBP continues to make refinements to the strategic plan and performance measures needed to help manage the program and achieve program goals. Until these refinements are completed, it will be difficult to assess progress made in CSI operations.