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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-344](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Aviation Subcommittee, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation; and another requester

## Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. air carriers transport billions of tons of cargo each year in both passenger planes and all-cargo planes. Typically, about one-half of the hull of each passenger aircraft is filled with cargo. As a result, any vulnerabilities in the air cargo security system potentially threaten the entire air transport system.

GAO agreed to determine the security vulnerabilities that have been identified in the air cargo system, the status of key recommendations that have been made since 1990 to improve air cargo security, and ways in which air cargo security can be improved in the near- and long-term.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that TSA develop a comprehensive plan for air cargo security that identifies priority actions on the basis of risk, costs, and performance targets, and establishes deadlines for completing those actions.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-344](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-344).

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gerald Dillingham, Ph.D., at (202) 512-2834 or [dillingham@gao.gov](mailto:dillingham@gao.gov).

## AVIATION SECURITY

# Vulnerabilities and Potential Improvements for the Air Cargo System

## What GAO Found

Numerous government and industry studies have identified vulnerabilities in the air cargo system. These vulnerabilities occur in the security procedures of some air carriers and freight forwarders and in possible tampering with freight at various handoffs that occur from the point when cargo leaves a shipper to the point when it is loaded onto an aircraft. As a result, any weaknesses in this program could create security risks.

FAA or the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which now has responsibility for ensuring air cargo security, has implemented a number of key recommendations and mandates to improve air cargo security made since 1990 by numerous government organizations. For example, FAA and the air cargo industry developed security training guides for air carriers and ground personnel who handle air cargo. However, a few recommendations by those groups, such as conducting research and operational tests of technology to screen cargo for explosives, are ongoing and not yet completed by TSA, or have not been implemented.

Federal reports, industry groups, and security experts have identified operational and technological measures that have the potential to improve air cargo security in the near-term. Examples of the measures include checking the identity of individuals making cargo deliveries and implementing a computerized cargo profiling system. In addition, long-term improvements, such as developing a comprehensive cargo-security plan, have been recommended by the above sources, but not implemented by TSA. Each potential improvement measure, however, needs to be weighed against other issues, such as costs and the effects on the flow of cargo. Without a comprehensive plan that incorporates a risk management approach and sets deadlines and performance targets, TSA and other federal decisionmakers cannot know whether resources are being deployed as effectively and efficiently as possible in implementing measures to reduce the risk and mitigate the consequences of a terrorist attack.

### Cargo Being Loaded on an Airplane



Source: Cargo King, Ltd.