



Highlights of [GAO-07-756](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 9/11, the federal government has taken steps to ensure that transportation workers are screened to ensure that they do not pose a security risk. However, the number of DHS background check programs has raised concerns that such workers may be subject to redundant background check programs. The Security and Accountability for Every Port Act of 2006 required GAO to conduct a study of those DHS background check programs similar to the one required of truck drivers to obtain a hazardous material endorsement (HME). For this study, GAO examined DHS background check programs to identify (1) potential redundancies and inconsistencies, if any, connected with these programs, and (2) actions, if any, DHS is taking or planning to coordinate its background check programs. To address these objectives, GAO examined selected background check programs, interviewed DHS officials and private stakeholders, and reviewed relevant documents.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS ensure that its coordination plan (1) includes implementation steps, time frames, and budget requirements, (2) discusses potential costs/benefits of program standardization, and (3) explore options for coordinating and aligning background checks within DHS and other federal agencies. DHS generally agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-756

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or GoldenkoffR@gao.gov.

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

DHS Efforts to Eliminate Redundant Background Check Investigations

What GAO Found

The six programs GAO reviewed—HME, Transportation Worker Identification Credential, Merchant Mariner Document, Free and Secure Trade, Secure Identification Display Areas, and Air Cargo—are conducted independently of one another and collect similar information and use similar background check processes. Also, each program operates separate enrollment facilities to collect background information and does not share it with the other programs. In some cases, GAO found variations in the fees applicants are charged, as well as differences in disqualifying offenses and renewal requirements between the programs. Redundant background checks will affect program costs to workers and the government, for example through inefficient use of existing facilities. However, DHS does not keep track of the number of those workers who, needing multiple credentials, are subjected to multiple background check programs. Thus, DHS is not able to determine either potential costs associated with redundant checks or potential benefits to be derived from eliminating redundant checks by aligning the background check requirements to make the programs more consistent.

Several DHS components are in the initial stages of initiatives to consolidate, coordinate, and align background check programs, thereby potentially reducing redundancies among these programs. For example, in January 2007, TSA determined that the background checks required for an HME, Free and Secure Trade card, and Merchant Mariner Document issued during certain periods satisfy the background check requirement for a Transportation Worker Identification Credential. In addition, the Screening Coordination Office (SCO) was established in July 2006, in part, to coordinate DHS screening programs. In December 2006, SCO issued a report identifying common problems, challenges, and needed improvements in the credentialing programs and processes across the department. The SCO awarded a contract in April 2007 that will provide the methodology and support for developing an implementation plan to include common design and comparability standards and related milestones to coordinate DHS screening and credentialing programs. At the time of GAO's review, DHS did not have a plan with budget requirements or implementation steps, and related milestones for consolidating, coordinating, and aligning its screening programs. Prior GAO work has shown that it is essential to establish long-term action-oriented implementation goals and a time frame with milestone dates to track an organization's progress toward its goals and that uncoordinated program efforts can exceed budget requirements. Further, other federal agencies have background check programs as well. A governmentwide examination of such programs is beyond the scope of GAO's mandate; however, redundancies and inefficiencies may exist in the background check programs that GAO did not examine. Because DHS is responsible for a large number of background check programs, the department might be best positioned to explore—with other federal agencies—possible options to coordinate and align background check programs governmentwide.