



DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Office of Inspector General

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DHS OIG Releases Report on Background Checks for Federal Passenger and Baggage Screeners at Airports

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WASHINGTON, DC, FEBRUARY 3, 2004 – The U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General released *A Review of Background Checks for Federal Passenger and Baggage Screeners at Airports*. The report addresses the efforts of the department's Transportation Security Administration to conduct background checks on its screener workforce.

The report found that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) completed up to four background checks on each of 55,600 screener appointees and thousands of unsuccessful applicants—totaling over 360,000 checks. Although contractors performed the checks and helped TSA review most results, TSA was responsible for managing the contractors' work, tracking background check progress and completion, making final suitability decisions, and terminating employees who failed the checks. The deadlines were short, and the scale of hiring was large. Even with contractor support, TSA was not able to manage the background checks in an orderly and consistent manner.

Managing the volume of checks overtaxed TSA's personnel security office. Screeners were hired, trained, and, in some cases, put to work contrary to sound personnel security practices. The report noted that:

- TSA did not assign an official position risk designation for screeners. Consequently, TSA either chose an appropriate, inadequate, or excessive level of investigation.
- TSA did not maintain control over the quantity, quality, and timeliness of background check documentation and processing. TSA did not initiate timely final background checks and initiated unnecessary background checks on thousands of screeners. TSA's inadequate oversight of its contractors contributed to more than 500 boxes of background check documentation remaining unprocessed for months.

- TSA allowed some screeners to work without first completing a criminal history records check, and retained others with adverse background checks for weeks or months while processing the results of the background checks and terminations.
- TSA's personnel security office did not: (1) develop a comprehensive plan to administer the background checks effectively; (2) have sufficient staff to meet workload demands; (3) provide sufficient oversight of the contractors' performance; and (4) develop an adequate information tracking system to manage the process.

In recent months TSA reorganized the personnel security function, added personnel security staff, began developing policies, modified several of its procedures, and took other measures to correct the identified deficiencies.

The report provides 12 recommendations for strengthening TSA's process for conducting screener background checks. The Office of Inspector General will monitor TSA's corrective actions.

The report is available on the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General website at: http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial_0334.xml.

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