



Highlights of [GAO-07-118](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) plays a vital role in advancing transportation safety by investigating accidents, determining their causes, and issuing safety recommendations. To support its mission, NTSB's training center, which opened in 2003, provides training to NTSB investigators and others. It is important that NTSB use its resources efficiently to carry out its mission. GAO was asked to examine the extent to which NTSB follows leading management practices, how NTSB carries out its transportation safety function, and the extent to which NTSB's training center is cost-effective, including potential options for improving the center's cost-effectiveness. GAO reviewed NTSB documents and data concerning management practices and accident investigations, interviewed relevant NTSB and other federal officials, and evaluated NTSB's management practices based on leading practices identified in prior work.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that NTSB fully implement leading management practices, develop risk-based criteria for determining which accidents to investigate, increase its utilization of safety studies, determine whether to develop a business plan to increase the utilization of its training center or vacate it, and take steps to rectify its violation of the Anti-Deficiency Act. NTSB agreed with the recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-118](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-118).

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

# NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

## Progress Made, Yet Management Practices, Investigation Priorities, and Training Center Use Should Be Improved

### What GAO Found

While NTSB has recently made progress in following leading management practices, its overall use of leading management practices in the seven areas GAO examined was either minimal or partial. NTSB minimally follows leading practices in strategic planning, information technology, and knowledge management. NTSB partially follows leading practices in human capital management, communications, acquisition management, and financial accountability and control. For example, regarding human capital management, NTSB developed a detailed staffing plan. However, the agency lacks a strategic training plan and a diversity management strategy, which are important for ensuring that an organization has strategies for achieving the appropriate mix of skills to achieve its mission. In addition, while NTSB follows some leading practices for financial management, it is noncompliant with the Anti-Deficiency Act because it did not obtain budget authority for the net present value of the entire 20-year lease for its training center lease obligation at the time the lease agreement was signed in 2001.

NTSB carries out its transportation safety function by selecting which accidents to investigate, investigating accidents and issuing recommendations, and taking proactive steps outside of specific accidents. For some transportation modes, NTSB has risk-based criteria for selecting which accidents to investigate, while for others it does not. Such criteria are important to ensure NTSB is using its resources to achieve a maximum safety benefit, particularly because, by statute, NTSB must allocate a large proportion of its resources to investigating aviation accidents, which may reduce the number of staff that NTSB can use to investigate accidents in other modes that may have critical safety implications. To its credit, although accident investigations are sometimes lengthy, NTSB issues urgent recommendations during the course of an investigation. In addition, NTSB proactively carries out its mission by conducting safety studies to consider issues that may be relevant to more than one accident. Safety studies, which sometimes result in recommendations, may also reduce the likelihood of recurrence of transportation accidents. Over the last 6 years, NTSB has conducted four safety studies. Industry stakeholders stated they would like NTSB to conduct more safety studies.

NTSB's training center is not cost-effective, as the combination of the training center's revenues and external training costs avoided by NTSB staff's use of the facility do not cover the center's costs. In fiscal year 2005, costs exceeded revenues by \$3.9 million. Furthermore, the training center has had a limited impact on avoiding external training costs, as the majority of NTSB staff training occurs externally. Potential strategies to increase revenues or decrease costs could increase the cost-effectiveness of the training center; however, vacating the space may be the least-cost strategy.