



Highlights of [GAO-07-346](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Passenger prescreening—a process that includes matching passengers' identifying information against records extracted from the U.S. government terrorist watch list—is one of several security measures in place to help ensure the safety of commercial flights traveling to or from the United States. DHS has several efforts underway to strengthen international aviation passenger prescreening. This report focuses on certain elements of the passenger prescreening process as well as some of the actions that DHS is taking or has planned to strengthen prescreening procedures. This report is a limited version of the original November 2006 report as various agencies that we reviewed deemed some of the information in the original report to be security sensitive. GAO's work included interviewing officials and assessing relevant documentation from federal agencies, U.S. and foreign air carriers, industry groups, and several foreign countries.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommended in November 2006 that the Department of Homeland Security (1) complete a strategic plan and develop an evaluation strategy for one of its prescreening programs, (2) take steps to ensure that international and domestic prescreening programs are aligned, and (3) ensure full compliance with applicable privacy laws. DHS generally concurred with these recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-346](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-346).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cathy Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or [berrickc@gao.gov](mailto:berrickc@gao.gov).

## AVIATION SECURITY

# Efforts to Strengthen International Passenger Prescreening are Under Way, but Planning and Implementation Issues Remain

## What GAO Found

Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) agency responsible for international passenger prescreening, has planned or is taking several actions designed to strengthen the aviation passenger prescreening process. One such effort involves CBP stationing U.S. personnel overseas to evaluate the authenticity of the travel documents of certain high-risk passengers prior to boarding U.S.-bound flights. Under this pilot program, called the Immigration Advisory Program (IAP), CBP officers personally interview some passengers deemed to be high-risk and evaluate the authenticity and completeness of these passengers' travel documents. IAP officers also provide technical assistance and training to air carrier staff on the identification of improperly documented passengers destined for the United States. The IAP has been tested at several foreign airports and CBP is negotiating with other countries to expand it elsewhere and to make certain IAP sites permanent. Successful implementation of the IAP rests, in part, on CBP clearly defining the goals and objectives of the program through the development of a strategic plan.

A second aviation passenger prescreening effort designed to strengthen the passenger prescreening process is intended to align international passenger prescreening with a similar program (currently under development) for prescreening passengers on domestic flights. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA)—a separate agency within DHS—is developing a domestic passenger prescreening program called Secure Flight. If CBP's international prescreening program and TSA's Secure Flight program are not effectively aligned once Secure Flight becomes operational, this could result in separate implementation requirements for air carriers and increased costs for both air carriers and the government. CBP and TSA officials stated that they are taking steps to coordinate their prescreening efforts, but they have not yet made all key policy decisions.

In addition to these efforts to strengthen certain international aviation passenger prescreening procedures, one other issue requires consideration in the context of these efforts. This issue involves DHS providing the traveling public with assurances of privacy protection as required by federal privacy law. Federal privacy law requires agencies to inform the public about how the government uses their personal information. Although CBP officials have stated that they have taken and are continuing to take steps to comply with these requirements, the current prescreening process allows passenger information to be used in multiple prescreening procedures and transferred among various CBP prescreening systems in ways that are not fully explained in CBP's privacy disclosures. If CBP does not issue all appropriate disclosures, the traveling public will not be fully aware of how their personal information is being used during the passenger prescreening process.