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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-182T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

More than 5.5 billion pounds of explosives are used each year in the United States by private sector companies and government entities. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) has authority to regulate explosives and to license privately owned explosives storage facilities. After the July 2004 theft of several hundred pounds of explosives from a local government storage facility, concerns arose about vulnerability to theft.

This testimony provides information about (1) the extent of explosives thefts from state and local government facilities, (2) ATF's authority to regulate and oversee state and local government storage facilities, and (3) security measures in place at selected state and local government storage facilities. This information is based on a report GAO is releasing today on these issues.

What GAO Recommends

In the report released today, GAO is recommending that the Attorney General direct the ATF Director to clarify explosives incident reporting regulations to help ensure that all entities storing explosives, including state and local government agencies, understand their obligation to report all thefts or missing explosives. The Department of Justice agreed with GAO's recommendation and indicated it would take steps to implement it.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-182T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Laurie Ekstrand at (202) 512-8777 or ekstrandl@gao.gov.

ATF

Thefts of Explosives from State and Local Government Storage Facilities Are Few but May Be Underreported

What GAO Found

Judging from available ATF data, there have been few thefts of explosives from state and local government storage facilities. From January 2002 to February 2005, ATF received 9 reports of thefts or missing explosives from state and local facilities, compared with a total of 205 explosives thefts reported from all sources nationwide during this same period. During the course of the audit, GAO found evidence of 5 thefts from state and local government facilities, 1 of which did not appear in ATF's national database of thefts and missing explosives. Thus, the actual number of thefts occurring at state and local facilities could be higher than that identified by ATF data.

ATF has no authority to oversee or inspect state and local government explosives storage facilities. State and local agencies are not required to obtain a license from ATF to use and store explosives, and only licensees—such as private sector explosives storage facilities—are subject to mandatory oversight. Thus, ATF has no means to ensure that state and local facilities comply with federal regulations. Further, ATF does not collect nationwide information on the number and location of state and local storage facilities, nor does the agency know the types and amounts of explosives being stored in these facilities. Because this data collection is a function of the licensing process and state and local facilities are not required to be licensed, no systematic information about these facilities is collected. By comparison, all licensed private sector facilities must submit a variety of information about their facilities—including location and security measures in place—to ATF during the licensing process. ATF also collects information about these facilities during mandatory inspections.

At the 18 state and local government storage facilities GAO visited, a variety of security measures were in place, including locked gates, fencing, patrols, and in some cases electronic surveillance. All the facilities' officials told GAO that they conducted routine inventories. But most of the state and local government entities GAO visited were not required to be licensed or inspected by state or local regulatory agencies. GAO identified several instances of possible noncompliance with federal regulations, but these were related primarily to storage safety issues rather than security.

Explosives Storage Facilities in Pennsylvania and Texas



Source: GAO.