



Highlights of [GAO-05-126](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Beginning on November 19, 2004, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is required by law to begin allowing commercial airports to apply to use private contractors to screen passengers and checked baggage. A federal workforce has performed this work since November 2002, in response to a congressional mandate that the federal government take over screening services after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. A 2-year pilot program at five airports testing the effectiveness of private sector screening in a post-September 11 environment concluded on November 18, 2004.

This report contains GAO's preliminary observations related to TSA's progress in developing a private screening program that allows airports to apply to opt out of using federal screeners. GAO assessed: (1) the status of TSA's efforts to develop policies and procedures for the opt-out program, including operational plans and guidelines for selecting airports and contractors that may participate; (2) guidance about the opt-out program that TSA has provided to airport operators and private contractors, or plans to develop, and how the information is communicated; and (3) TSA's efforts to develop performance measures for evaluating the opt-out program and contractor performance.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-126](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-126).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cathleen A. Berrick at (202) 512-8777 or [berrickc@gao.gov](mailto:berrickc@gao.gov).

## AVIATION SECURITY

# Preliminary Observations on TSA's Progress to Allow Airports to Use Private Passenger and Baggage Screeners

## What GAO Found

As of November 2004, TSA has completed or is developing key policies and procedures for the opt-out program. Specifically, TSA has completed and released guidelines for determining how and when private screening contractors will be evaluated and selected to participate in the opt-out program. TSA also has released supplemental information for evaluating potential contractors, such as their financial capabilities. TSA also has prepared a draft technical statement of work for the private screening contractors operating at the five airports that participated in the pilot program, which is to serve as a basis for contractors seeking to serve other airports. In addition, TSA has developed, or is currently developing, internal guidance for managing the opt-out program, such as a transition plan for helping airports to move from federal to private screeners. TSA expects to complete the remaining policies and procedures by mid-2005.

TSA is taking steps to communicate with stakeholders about the opt-out program by developing informational guidance and soliciting information and suggestions from them. For instance, since releasing initial summary guidance about the program in June 2004, TSA has posted an opt-out program application for airport operators that asks, among other things, the primary reason for wanting to participate in the opt-out program and the preferred timeline for transitioning to private screening operations. TSA also has posted lists of frequently asked questions and answers on its Web site, in response to questions from stakeholders about the airport application and contracting process. However, some airport operators, private screening contractors, and aviation industry representatives told GAO that they need additional information about how much leeway airports and contractors would have to manage the program, liability protection, and costs related to participating in the opt-out program.

TSA is developing performance measures both to assess the screening performance of airports that will participate in the opt-out program and individual contractors performing the screening services, but specific performance measures have not been finalized. TSA said measures for the opt-out program will be based on measures already developed by an independent consulting firm for the five airports that participated in the opt-out pilot program. These measures include how well screeners detect test threat objects, such as guns and knives, during screening operations. TSA is also developing performance measures to evaluate how well private screening contractors comply with the terms of their contracts, which will become part of a quality assurance plan. TSA expects to implement contractor-related performance measures in mid-2005, as contracts are being awarded.

A draft of this report was provided to TSA. TSA officials generally agreed with our findings and provided technical comments that have been incorporated as appropriate.