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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-371T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Securing commercial aviation is a daunting task—with hundreds of airports, thousands of aircraft, and thousands of flights daily carrying millions of passengers and pieces of checked baggage. It has been over 3 years since the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) assumed responsibility for passenger and baggage screening at commercial airports. This testimony focuses on the progress TSA is making in strengthening airline passenger and checked baggage screening and the challenges that remain. Particularly, this testimony highlights TSA's efforts to (1) enhance the performance, management, and deployment of the transportation security officer (TSO) workforce; (2) strengthen procedures for screening passengers and checked baggage; and (3) leverage and deploy screening technologies.

What GAO Recommends

In prior reports, GAO has made numerous recommendations designed to strengthen aviation security, to include passenger and checked baggage screening operations. TSA generally agreed with our recommendations and is taking actions to implement them. GAO also has several ongoing reviews related to the issues addressed in this testimony, and will issue separate reports related to these areas at later dates, with additional recommendations as appropriate.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-371T.

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

AVIATION SECURITY

Enhancements Made in Passenger and Checked Baggage Screening, but Challenges Remain

What GAO Found

TSA has taken steps to enhance the TSO workforce's performance, management, and deployment, yet continues to face challenges in allocating staff and ensuring that training is available. For example, TSA developed a Screening Allocation Model to determine TSO staffing levels at commercial airports. However, some assumptions in the model—such as that 20 percent of the TSO workforce will be part-time—may be flawed, given that federal security directors (the lead TSA authorities at U.S. airports) have had difficulty filling this quota and some said they have not been able to hire up to their authorized staffing levels. In addition, while TSA has taken steps to improve the training offered to its TSO workforce, insufficient staffing and a lack of electronic connectivity to access on-line learning have prevented TSOs from taking full advantage of training opportunities.

TSA is proposing changes to its screening procedures to enhance detection capabilities in part based on risk assessments, as GAO has previously advocated. Since April 2005, TSA has gathered, vetted, and tested a variety of new procedures for passenger and baggage screening. Some passenger screening procedure changes are based on risk-related factors, including results of covert (undercover, unannounced) tests that are designed to reveal system vulnerabilities. Our ongoing work on how TSA makes these changes indicates that TSA could do more evaluation to ensure the changes achieve the desired results.

TSA has taken steps to develop and deploy technologies to strengthen commercial aviation security; however, challenges in funding and planning have created impediments to implementation. For example, TSA has deployed explosives detection systems—either stand-alone or incorporated in-line with baggage conveyor systems—to detect explosives in checked baggage. A TSA cost-benefit analysis of the in-line systems being installed at 9 airports showed that they could yield significant savings for the federal government. However, their deployment has been hampered by a lack of planning and funding strategies. TSA is currently assessing financing options to support the deployment of in-line systems and has begun prioritizing which airports would benefit from their deployment.



Source: FAA.