



Highlights of [GAO-06-389](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Preventing radioactive material from being smuggled into the United States is a key national security objective. To help address this threat, in October 2002, DHS began deploying radiation detection equipment at U.S. ports-of-entry. This report reviews recent progress DHS has made (1) deploying radiation detection equipment, (2) using radiation detection equipment, (3) improving the capabilities and testing of this equipment, and (4) increasing cooperation between DHS and other federal agencies in conducting radiation detection programs.

What GAO Recommends

The Secretary of Homeland Security should work with other agencies, as necessary, to (1) streamline internal review procedures so that spending data can be provided to the Congress in a more timely way; (2) update the current deployment plan; (3) analyze the benefits and costs of advanced portals, then revise the program's cost estimates to reflect current decisions; (4) develop ways to effectively screen rail containers; (5) revise agency procedures for container inspection; and (6) develop a way for CBP officers to verify NRC licenses.

In commenting on a draft of this report, DHS stated that it agreed with, and will implement, our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-389.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gene Aloise, (202) 512-3841.

COMBATING NUCLEAR SMUGGLING

DHS Has Made Progress Deploying Radiation Detection Equipment at U.S. Ports-of-Entry, but Concerns Remain

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has made progress in deploying radiation detection equipment at U.S. ports-of-entry, but the agency's program goals are unrealistic and the program cost estimate is uncertain. As of December 2005, DHS had deployed 670 portal monitors and over 19,000 pieces of handheld radiation detection equipment. However, the deployment of portal monitors has fallen behind schedule, making DHS's goal of deploying 3,034 by September 2009 unlikely. In particular, two factors have contributed to the schedule delay. First, DHS provides the Congress with information on portal monitor acquisitions and deployments before releasing any funds. However, DHS's lengthy review process has caused delays in providing such information to the Congress. Second, difficult negotiations with seaport operators about placement of portal monitors and how to most efficiently screen rail cars have delayed deployments at seaports. Regarding the uncertainty of the program's cost estimate, DHS would like to deploy advanced technology portals that will likely cost significantly more than the currently deployed portals, but tests have not yet shown that these portals are demonstrably more effective than the current portals. Consequently, it is not clear that the benefits of the new portals would be worth any increased cost to the program. Also, our analysis of the program's costs indicates that DHS may incur a \$342 million cost overrun.

DHS has improved in using detection equipment and in following the agency's inspection procedures since 2003, but we identified two potential issues in Customs and Border Protection (CBP) inspection procedures. First, although radiological materials being transported into the United States are generally required to have a Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) license, regulations do not require that the license accompany the shipment. Further, CBP officers do not have access to data that could be used to verify that shippers have acquired the necessary documentation. Second, CBP inspection procedures do not require officers to open containers and inspect them, although under some circumstances, doing so could improve security. In addition, DHS has sponsored research, development, and testing activities to address the inherent limitations of currently fielded equipment. However, much work remains to achieve consistently better detection capabilities.

DHS seems to have made progress in coordinating with other agencies to conduct radiation detection programs; however, because the DHS office created to achieve the coordination is less than 1 year old, its working relationships with other agencies are in their early stages of development and implementation. In the future, this office plans to develop a "global architecture" to integrate several agencies' radiation detection efforts, including several international programs.