

Why GAO Did This Study

This report is a publicly available version of our report on the Customs-Trade Partnership Against Terrorism (C-TPAT). The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) designated our original report as Limited Official Use because of the sensitive and specific nature of the information it contained. U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has implemented a layered approach to achieve its goals of (1) preventing terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering the United States and (2) facilitating the flow of legitimate trade and travel. One element of this approach is C-TPAT, which aims to secure the flow of goods bound for the United States by developing a strong, voluntary antiterrorism partnership with the trade community. GAO examined (1) what benefits are provided to C-TPAT members, (2) how CBP determines eligibility for these benefits, (3) what process CBP uses to verify that members have implemented security measures, and (4) how well CBP manages C-TPAT.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CBP eliminate the weaknesses in its validation process. GAO also recommends that CBP complete its human capital plan and performance measures and put in place internal controls for the program. CBP generally concurred with our recommendations and described corrective actions to respond to them.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-404.

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

CARGO SECURITY

Partnership Program Grants Importers Reduced Scrutiny with Limited Assurance of Improved Security

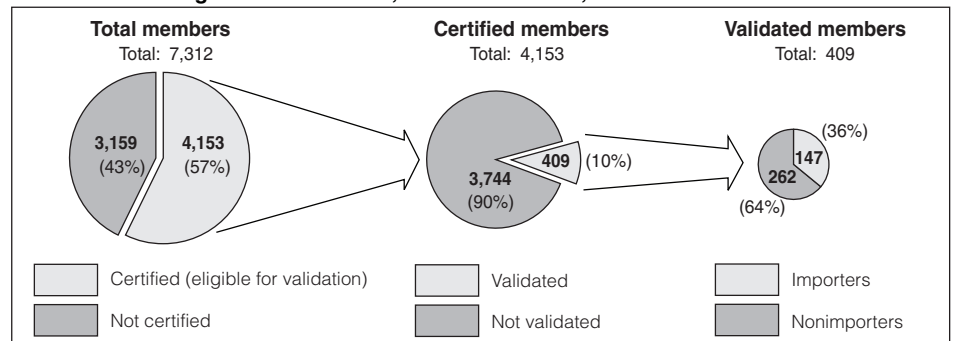
What GAO Found

CBP provides a range of benefits to C-TPAT members. In return for committing to improving the security of their shipments, C-TPAT members receive benefits that reduce the level of scrutiny provided to their U.S.-bound shipments. Thus, these benefits can lead to a reduced number of inspections and reduced border wait times for member shipments. Other benefits include an emphasis on self-policing, as well as eligibility to attend CBP-sponsored antiterrorism training.

CBP uses a two-pronged approach to assess C-TPAT members before granting benefits. First, CBP has a certification process to review self-reported information contained in both applicants' membership agreements and summaries of their security processes. Second, for importers, CBP has a vetting process to assess compliance and violation history. CBP believes that this two-pronged approach provides adequate assurance before granting benefits. However, this approach grants benefits to members before they undergo the validation process.

CBP's validation process to verify that C-TPAT members' security measures have been implemented and that program benefits should continue has several weaknesses. CBP's validation process is not rigorous enough to achieve its stated purpose, which is to ensure that the security procedures outlined in members' security profiles are reliable, accurate, and effective. In addition, CBP has not determined the extent to which it must conduct validations of members' security profiles to ensure that the operation of C-TPAT is consistent with its overall approach to managing risk.

Status of Validating C-TPAT Members, as of November 2, 2004



Source: GAO analysis of CBP data.

While CBP has developed a new strategic plan, it has not fully developed other management tools, such as a human capital plan, performance measures, or effective internal controls, needed to ensure that the program is actually meeting its objectives.