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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-05-700, a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

INFORMATION SECURITY

Department of Homeland Security Needs to Fully Implement Its Security Program

Why GAO Did This Study

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 mandated the merging of 22 federal agencies and organizations to create the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), whose mission, in part, is to protect our homeland from threats and attacks. DHS relies on a variety of computerized information systems to support its operations. GAO was asked to review DHS's information security program. In response, GAO determined whether DHS had developed, documented, and implemented a comprehensive, departmentwide information security program.

What GAO Recommends

To assist DHS in fully implementing its program, GAO is making recommendations to the Secretary of DHS to implement key information security practices and controls and to establish milestones for verifying the department's reported performance data. In providing written comments on a draft of this report, DHS generally agreed with the contents of the report and described actions recently completed, ongoing, or planned to implement its program.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-700.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gregory Wilshusen at 202-512-6244 or wilshuseng@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

DHS has not fully implemented a comprehensive, departmentwide information security program to protect the information and information systems that support its operations and assets. It has developed and documented departmental policies and procedures that could provide a framework for implementing such a program; however, certain departmental components have not yet fully implemented key information security practices and controls. For example, risk assessments—needed to determine what controls are necessary and what level of resources should be expended on them—were incomplete. Elements required for information system security plans—which would provide a full understanding of existing and planned information security requirements—were missing. Testing and evaluation of security controls—which are needed to determine the effectiveness of information security policies and procedures—were incomplete or not performed. Elements required for remedial action plans—which would identify the resources needed to correct or mitigate known information security weaknesses—were missing, as were elements required for continuity of operations plans to restore critical systems in case of unexpected events. The table below indicates with an "X" where GAO found weaknesses. In addition, DHS had not yet fully developed a complete and accurate systems inventory.

Weaknesses in Information Security Practices and Controls of Selected DHS Components

DHS component	Risk assessment	Security plan	Security test and evaluation	Remedial action plans	Continuity of operations
US-VISIT	n/a	X[a]	n/a	n/a	n/a
ICE			X	X	X
TSA			X	X	X
ICE	X		X		X
TSA	X		X	X	X
EP&R	X	X		X	X

Sources: GAO analysis of DHS information for United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT), Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Transportation Security Administration (TSA), and Emergency Preparedness and Response (EP&R).

[a]For US-VISIT, GAO reviewed only the security plan.

Shortfalls in executing responsibilities for ensuring compliance with the information security program allowed these weaknesses to occur. Although DHS has an organization that is responsible for overseeing the component implementation of key information security practices and controls, its primary means for doing so—an enterprisewide tool—has not been reliable. Until DHS addresses weaknesses with using the tool and implements a comprehensive, departmentwide information security program, its ability to protect its information and information systems will be limited.

United States Government Accountability Office