



Highlights of [GAO-03-1173](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Passenger screening is critical to the security of our nation's aviation system, particularly in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is tasked with securing all modes of transportation, including the screening of airline passengers. TSA has met numerous requirements in this regard, such as deploying more than 50,000 federal screeners at over 440 commercial airports nationwide. To determine whether TSA's passenger screening program is achieving its intended results, GAO is conducting an ongoing evaluation of TSA's efforts to (1) ensure that passenger screeners are effectively trained and supervised, (2) measure screener performance in detecting threat objects, and (3) implement and evaluate the contract screening pilot program.

What GAO Recommends

Because our evaluation is ongoing and our results are preliminary, we are not making any recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-1173.

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

AIRPORT PASSENGER SCREENING

Preliminary Observations on Progress Made and Challenges Remaining

What GAO Found

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) was tasked with the tremendous challenge of building a large federal agency responsible for securing all modes of transportation, while simultaneously meeting ambitious deadlines to enhance the security of the nation's aviation system. Although TSA has made significant progress related to its passenger screening program, challenges remain.

TSA recognized that ongoing training of screeners on a frequent basis, and effective supervisory training, is critical to maintaining and enhancing skills. However, TSA has not fully developed or deployed recurrent or supervisory training programs. Although TSA has not yet deployed these programs, it has taken steps in establishing recurrent and supervisory training, including developing six recurrent training modules that will soon be deployed to all airports, as well as working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Graduate School to tailor its off-the-shelf supervisory course to the specific training needs of TSA's screening supervisors.

TSA currently collects little information regarding screener performance in detecting threat objects. The primary source of information collected on screener's ability to detect threat objects is covert testing conducted by TSA's Office of Internal Affairs and Program Review. However, TSA does not consider the results of these tests as a measure of screener performance, but rather a "snapshot" of a screener's ability to detect threat objects at a particular point in time. Additionally, TSA does not currently use the Threat Image Projection system, which places images of threat objects on x-ray screens during actual operations and records whether screeners identify the threat. However, TSA plans to fully activate the Threat Image Projection system with significantly more threat images than previously used, as well as implement an annual screener certification program in October 2003. TSA also recently completed a screener performance improvement study and is taking steps to address the deficiencies identified during the study.

As required by the Aviation and Transportation Security Act, TSA implemented a pilot program using contract screeners in lieu of federal screeners at 5 commercial airports. However, TSA has not yet determined how to evaluate and measure the performance of the pilot program airports, or prepare for airports potentially applying to opt-out of using federal screeners, as allowed by the act, beginning in November 2004. Although TSA has not begun evaluating the performance of the pilot program airports, it plans to award a contract by October 1, 2003, to compare the performance of pilot screeners with federal screeners and determine the reasons for any differences. Numerous airport operators have contacted TSA to express an interest in obtaining more information to assist in their decision regarding opting-out of using federal screeners.