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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-09-422T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Transportation Security and Infrastructure Protection, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 mandates the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to establish a system to physically screen 50 percent of cargo transported on passenger aircraft by February 2009 and 100 percent of such cargo by August 2010. This testimony provides preliminary observations on the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) progress in meeting the mandate to screen cargo on passenger aircraft and the challenges TSA and industry stakeholders may face in screening such cargo. GAO's testimony is based on products issued from October 2005 through August 2008, and its ongoing review of air cargo security. GAO reviewed TSA's air cargo security programs, interviewed program officials and industry representatives, and visited two large U.S. airports.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations to DHS and TSA in prior reports to increase the security of air cargo, including completing vulnerability assessments and re-examining existing screening exemptions. DHS generally agreed with these recommendations and plans to address them. GAO discussed the preliminary observations in this statement with TSA officials. TSA agreed with GAO's findings.

View [GAO-09-422T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Stephen M. Lord at (202) 512-4379 or lords@gao.gov.

AVIATION SECURITY

Preliminary Observations on TSA's Progress and Challenges in Meeting the Statutory Mandate for Screening Air Cargo on Passenger Aircraft

What GAO Found

TSA has made progress in meeting the air cargo screening mandate as it applies to domestic cargo. TSA has taken steps that will allow screening responsibilities to be shared across the air cargo supply chain—including TSA, air carriers, freight forwarders (which consolidate cargo from shippers and take it to air carriers for transport), and shippers—although air carriers have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that they transport cargo screened at the requisite levels. TSA has taken several key steps to meet the mandate, including establishing a new requirement for 100 percent screening of cargo transported on narrow-body aircraft; revising or eliminating most screening exemptions for domestic cargo; creating the Certified Cargo Screening Program (CCSP) to allow screening to take place at various points in the air cargo supply chain; and establishing a screening technology pilot. Although TSA estimates that it achieved the mandated 50 percent screening level by February 2009 as it applies to domestic cargo, the agency cannot yet verify that the requisite levels of cargo are being screened. It is working to establish a system to do so by April 2009. Also, TSA's screening approach could result in variable percentages of screened cargo on passenger flights.

TSA and industry stakeholders may face a number of challenges in meeting the screening mandate, including attracting participants to the CCSP, and technology, oversight, and inbound cargo challenges. TSA's approach relies on the voluntary participation of shippers and freight forwarders, but it is unclear whether the facilities needed to meet TSA's screening estimates will join the CCSP. In addition, TSA has taken some steps to develop and test technologies for screening air cargo, but the agency has not yet completed assessments of these technologies and cannot be assured that they are effective in the cargo environment. TSA's limited inspection resources may also hamper its ability to oversee the thousands of additional entities that it expects to participate in the CCSP. Finally, TSA does not expect to meet the mandated 100 percent screening deadline as it applies to inbound air cargo, in part due to existing inbound screening exemptions and challenges it faces in harmonizing security standards with other nations.

Screening Air Cargo Using Explosives Trace Detection and Loading It onto Passenger Aircraft



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