



Highlights of [GAO-05-557](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

In January 2002, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) initiated the Container Security Initiative (CSI) to address the threat that terrorists might use maritime cargo containers to ship weapons of mass destruction. Under CSI, CBP is to target and inspect high-risk cargo shipments at foreign seaports before they leave for destinations in the United States. In July 2003, GAO reported that CSI had management challenges that limited its effectiveness. Given these challenges and in light of plans to expand the program, GAO examined selected aspects of the program's operation, including the (1) factors that affect CBP's ability to target shipments at foreign seaports, (2) extent to which high-risk containers have actually been inspected overseas, and (3) extent to which CBP formulated and documented strategies for achieving the program's goals.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CBP refine its staffing model to help improve the program's ability to target shipments at foreign ports, develop minimum technical requirements for the detection capabilities of equipment used in the program, and complete development of performance measures for all program objectives.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) generally concurred with our recommendations and described corrective actions to respond to them. The Department of State had no comments.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-557](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-557).  
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above.  
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# CONTAINER SECURITY

## A Flexible Staffing Model and Minimum Equipment Requirements Would Improve Overseas Targeting and Inspection Efforts

### What GAO Found

Some of the positive factors that have affected CBP's ability to target shipments overseas are improved information sharing between U.S. and foreign customs staff and a heightened level of bilateral cooperation and international awareness of the need to secure the whole global shipping system. Although the program aims to target all U.S.-bound shipments from CSI ports, it has been unable to do so because of staffing imbalances. CBP has developed a staffing model to determine staffing needs but has been unable to fully staff some ports because of diplomatic considerations (e.g., the need for host government permission) and practical considerations (e.g., workspace constraints). As a result, 35 percent of these shipments were not targeted and were therefore not subject to inspection overseas. In addition, the staffing model's reliance on placing staff at CSI ports rather than considering whether some of the targeting functions could be performed in the United States limits the program's operational efficiency and effectiveness.

CBP has not established minimum technical requirements for the detection capability of nonintrusive inspection and radiation detection equipment used as part of CSI. Ports participating in CSI use various types of nonintrusive inspection equipment to inspect containers, and the detection and identification capabilities of such equipment can vary. In addition, technologies to detect other weapons of mass destruction have limitations. Given these conditions, CBP has limited assurance that inspections conducted under CSI are effective at detecting and identifying terrorist weapons of mass destruction.

Although CBP has made some improvements in the management of CSI, we found that further refinements to the bureau's management tools are needed to help achieve program objectives. In July 2003, we recommended that CBP develop a strategic plan and performance measures, including outcome-oriented measures, for CSI. CBP developed a strategic plan for CSI in February 2004 that contains three of the six key elements required for agency strategic plans, and CBP officials told us they continue to develop the other three elements. While it appears that the bureau's efforts in this area meet the intent of our prior recommendation to develop a strategic plan for CSI, we will continue to monitor progress in this area. CBP has also made progress in the development of outcome-oriented performance measures, particularly for the program objective of increasing information sharing and collaboration among CSI and host country personnel. However, CBP continues to face challenges in developing performance measures to assess the effectiveness of CSI targeting and inspection activities. Therefore, it is difficult to assess progress made in CSI operations over time, and it is difficult to compare CSI operations across ports.