TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

TSA Has Made Progress in Implementing the Transportation Worker Identification Credential Program, but Challenges Remain

Why GAO Did This Study

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is developing the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) to help ensure that only workers who are not known to pose a terrorist threat are allowed to enter secure areas of the nation's transportation facilities. This testimony is based primarily on GAO's September 2006 report on the TWIC program, and interviews with TSA and maritime industry officials conducted in September and October 2007 to obtain updates on the TWIC program. Specifically, this testimony addresses (1) the progress TSA has made since September 2006 in implementing the TWIC program and addressing GAO recommendations; and (2) some of the remaining challenges that TSA and the maritime industry must overcome to ensure the successful implementation of the program.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has previously recommended that TSA develop a comprehensive plan for managing the TWIC program, conduct additional testing of the TWIC program to help ensure that all key components work effectively, strengthen contract planning and oversight practices, and develop a plan for communicating and coordinating with stakeholders. TSA agreed with these recommendations and has initiated actions to address them.

What GAO Found

Since GAO reported on TWIC in September 2006, TSA has made progress in implementing the program. Although GAO has not yet independently assessed the effectiveness of these efforts, TSA has taken actions to address legislative requirements to implement and test the program as well as address GAO's recommendations related to conducting additional systems testing, strengthening contractor oversight, and improving coordination with stakeholders. Specifically, TSA has

- issued a rule in January 2007 that sets forth the requirements for enrolling maritime workers in the TWIC program and issuing cards to these workers, and awarded a $70 million dollar contract to begin enrolling workers;
- reported conducting performance testing of the technologies that will be used to enroll workers in the TWIC program to ensure that they work effectively before implementation;
- begun planning a pilot program to test TWIC access control technologies at 5 maritime locations in accordance with the Security and Accountability for Every Port Act;
- begun enrolling workers and issuing TWIC cards at the port of Wilmington, Delaware on October 16, 2007, and plans to do so at 11 additional ports by November 2007;
- added additional staff with program and contract management expertise to help oversee the TWIC enrollment contract; and
- stated that they have taken actions to improve communication and coordination with maritime stakeholders.

As TSA moves forward with TWIC, it and maritime industry stakeholders will be faced with addressing the following key challenges that can affect the programs' successful implementation.

- TSA and its contractor will need to transition from testing of the TWIC program to successful implementation of the program on a larger scale covering 770,000 workers at about 3,200 maritime facilities and 5,300 vessels.
- TSA and its contractor will need to educate workers on new TWIC requirements, ensure that enrollments begin in a timely manner, and efficiently process background checks, appeals, and waivers.
- TSA and industry stakeholders will need to ensure that TWIC access control technologies work effectively in the maritime environment, and balance new security requirements while facilitating maritime commerce.

United States Government Accountability Office