


GAO
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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-440T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Securing commercial aviation is a daunting task—with hundreds of airports and thousands of flights daily carrying millions of passengers and pieces of baggage. In an effort to strengthen the security of commercial aviation, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) was created and charged with making numerous enhancements to aviation security, including federalizing passenger and baggage screening and screening checked baggage using explosive detection systems. To assess the progress of passenger and baggage screening operations, GAO was asked to describe TSA's efforts to (1) hire and deploy passenger and baggage screeners, (2) train the screening workforce, (3) measure screener performance in detecting threat objects, and (4) leverage and deploy screening equipment and technologies.

What GAO Recommends

In prior reports, GAO has made numerous recommendations designed to strengthen airport passenger and baggage screening. GAO also has several ongoing reviews related to the issues addressed in this testimony, and will issue separate reports related to these areas at later dates, with additional recommendations as appropriate.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-440T.

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, Berrickc@gao.gov.

AVIATION SECURITY

Challenges Exist in Stabilizing and Enhancing Passenger and Baggage Screening Operations

What GAO Found

TSA met its mandate to establish a federal screener workforce by November 2002, but continues to face challenges in hiring and deploying passenger and baggage screeners. Staffing shortages at some airports and TSA's hiring process have hindered TSA's ability to fully staff screening checkpoints without using additional measures, such as overtime. In addition, while TSA has taken steps to enhance its screener training programs, staffing shortages and lack of high-speed connectivity at airport training facilities have made it difficult for screeners at some airports to fully utilize these programs.

TSA has also undertaken several initiatives to measure the performance of passenger screeners in detecting threat objects. These efforts include increasing covert testing at screening checkpoints and conducting annual recertifications of screeners. While TSA is making progress in measuring the performance of passenger screeners, it has collected limited performance data related to its baggage screening operations. However, TSA has begun collecting additional performance data related to its baggage screening operations, and plans to increase these efforts in the future.

TSA also continues to face challenges in deploying and leveraging screening equipment and technologies. TSA deployed Explosive Detection Systems and Explosive Trace Detection equipment to all airports to screen checked baggage. However, TSA has been unable to fully utilize this equipment to screen 100 percent of checked baggage due to screener shortages, and equipment out of service for maintenance and/or repairs. When this equipment is not available, TSA continues to screen checked baggage using alternative means. TSA also has ongoing initiatives designed to increase the efficiency of screening checked baggage, including implementing in-line baggage screening systems and streamlining screening processes.

TSA is also conducting research and development (R&D) activities to strengthen passenger and baggage screening. These efforts are designed to improve detection capability, performance, and efficiency for current technologies, and to develop next generation screening equipment. TSA faces a number of challenges with its R&D program, including balancing funding with competing priorities, and working with other components of the Department of Homeland Security to develop a strategy for merging their R&D programs.

Passenger Screening Checkpoint at U.S. Airport



Source: FAA.