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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-07-378T](#), a report to a testimony before the Subcommittee on Terrorism, Technology, and Homeland Security, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

This testimony summarizes a December 2006 GAO report on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to implement the U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT) program at land ports of entry (POE). US-VISIT is designed to collect, maintain, and share data on selected foreign nationals entering and exiting the United States at air, sea, and land POEs. These data, including biometric identifiers like digital fingerprints, are to be used to screen persons against watch lists, verify identities, and record arrival and departure. This testimony addresses DHS's efforts to (1) implement US-VISIT entry capability, (2) implement US-VISIT exit capability, and (3) define how US-VISIT fits with other emerging border security initiatives. GAO analyzed DHS and US-VISIT documents, interviewed program officials, and visited 21 land POEs with varied traffic levels on both borders.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommended that DHS improve management controls for US-VISIT; develop performance measures to assess the impact of US-VISIT at land POEs; and ensure that a statutorily mandated report describes how DHS will move to a biometric entry/exit capability and align US-VISIT with emerging land border security initiatives. DHS generally agreed and said that it has begun to or plans to implement GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-378T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Richard Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.

BORDER SECURITY

US-VISIT Program Faces Strategic, Operational, and Technological Challenges at Land Ports of Entry

What GAO Found

US-VISIT entry capability had been installed at 154 of the 170 land POEs. Officials at all 21 sites GAO visited reported that US-VISIT had improved their ability to process visitors and verify identities. DHS plans to further enhance US-VISIT's capabilities by, among other things, requiring new technology and equipment for scanning all 10 fingerprints (see photo, below left). While this may aid border security, installation could increase processing times and adversely affect operations at land POEs where space constraints, traffic congestion, and processing delays already exist. GAO's work indicated that management controls in place to identify such problems and evaluate operations were insufficient and inconsistently administered. For example, GAO identified computer processing problems at 12 sites visited; at 9 of these, the problems were not always reported. US-VISIT has developed performance measures, but measures to gauge factors that uniquely affect land POE operations were not developed; these would put US-VISIT officials in a better position to identify areas for improvement.

US-VISIT officials concluded that, for various reasons, a biometric US-VISIT exit capability cannot now be implemented without incurring a major impact on land POE facilities. An interim nonbiometric exit technology tested (see photo, below right) did not meet the statutory requirement for a biometric exit capability and thus cannot ensure that visitors who enter the country are those who leave. DHS had not yet reported to Congress on a required plan describing how it intended to fully implement a biometric entry/exit program or use nonbiometric solutions. Until this plan is finalized, neither DHS nor Congress is in a good position to prioritize and allocate program resources or plan for POE facilities modifications.

DHS had not articulated how US-VISIT is to align with other emerging land border security initiatives and mandates, and thus could not ensure that the program would meet strategic program goals and operate cost effectively at land POEs. Knowing how US-VISIT is to work with these initiatives, such as one requiring U.S. citizens, Canadians, and others to present passports or other documents at land POEs in 2009, is important for understanding the broader strategic context for US-VISIT and identifying resources, tools, and potential facility modifications needed to ensure success.

US-VISIT entry capability set up with computer and camera (left); nonbiometric exit identification readers mounted over highway (right)



Source: GAO.