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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-08-329T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is responsible for keeping terrorists and other dangerous people from entering the country while also facilitating the cross-border movement of millions of travelers. CBP carries out this responsibility at 326 air, sea, and land ports of entry. In response to a congressional request, GAO examined CBP traveler inspection efforts, the progress made, and the challenges that remain in staffing and training at ports of entry, and the progress CBP has made in developing strategic plans and performance measures for its traveler inspection program. To conduct its work, GAO reviewed and analyzed CBP data and documents related to inspections, staffing, and training, interviewed managers and officers, observed inspections at eight major air and land ports of entry, and tested inspection controls at eight small land ports of entry. GAO's testimony is based on a report GAO issued November 5, 2007.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO made recommendations aimed at enhancing internal controls in the inspection process, mechanisms for measuring training provided and new officer proficiency, and a performance measure for apprehending inadmissible aliens and other violators. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) concurred with GAO's recommendations. DHS said that CBP is taking steps to address the recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-329T](#). For more information, contact Richard Stana at (202) 512-8777 or [stanar@gao.gov](mailto:stanar@gao.gov).

## BORDER SECURITY

### Despite Progress, Weaknesses in Traveler Inspections Exist at Our Nation's Ports of Entry

#### What GAO Found

CBP has had some success in identifying inadmissible aliens and other violators, but weaknesses in its operations increase the potential that terrorists and inadmissible travelers could enter the country. In fiscal year 2006, CBP turned away over 200,000 inadmissible aliens and interdicted other violators. Although CBP's goal is to interdict all violators, CBP estimated that several thousand inadmissible aliens and other violators entered the country through ports of entry in fiscal year 2006. Weaknesses in 2006 inspection procedures, such as not verifying the citizenship and admissibility of each traveler, contribute to failed inspections. Although CBP took actions to address these weaknesses, subsequent follow-up work conducted by GAO months after CBP's actions found that weaknesses such as those described above still existed. In July 2007, CBP issued detailed procedures for conducting inspections including requiring field office managers to assess compliance with these procedures. However, CBP has not established an internal control to ensure field office managers share their assessments with CBP headquarters to help ensure that the new procedures are consistently implemented across all ports of entry and reduce the risk of failed traveler inspections.

CBP developed a staffing model that estimates it needs up to several thousand more staff. Field office managers said that staffing shortages affected their ability to carry out anti-terrorism programs and created other vulnerabilities in the inspections process. CBP recognizes that officer attrition has impaired its ability to attain budgeted staffing levels and is in the process of developing a strategy to help curb attrition. CBP has made progress in developing training programs; however, it does not measure the extent to which it provides training to all who need it and whether new officers demonstrate proficiency in required skills.

CBP issued a strategic plan for operations at its ports of entry and has collected performance data that can be used to measure its progress in achieving its strategic goals. However, current performance measures do not gauge CBP effectiveness in apprehending inadmissible aliens and other violators, a key strategic goal.

Vehicle Lanes at the San Ysidro Port of Entry



Passenger Lines at JFK International Airport



Source: GAO.