



Highlights of [GAO-09-292](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

To enhance aviation security, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Transportation Security Administration (TSA) developed a program—known as Secure Flight—to assume from air carriers the function of matching passenger information against terrorist watch-list records. In accordance with a mandate in the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2008, GAO's objective was to assess the extent to which TSA met the requirements of 10 statutory conditions related to the development of the Secure Flight program. GAO is required to review the program until all 10 conditions are met. In September 2008, DHS certified that it had satisfied all 10 conditions. To address this objective, GAO (1) identified key activities related to each of the 10 conditions; (2) identified federal guidance and best practices that are relevant to successfully meeting each condition; (3) analyzed whether TSA had demonstrated, through program documentation and oral explanation, that the guidance was followed and best practices were met; and (4) assessed the risks associated with not fully following applicable guidance and meeting best practices.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS take action to periodically assess the performance of the Secure Flight system's name-matching capabilities and results. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendation.

[View GAO-09-292](#) or [key components](#).

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AVIATION SECURITY

TSA Has Completed Key Activities Associated with Implementing Secure Flight, but Additional Actions Are Needed to Mitigate Risks

What GAO Found

As of April 2009, TSA had generally achieved 9 of the 10 statutory conditions related to the development of the Secure Flight program and had conditionally achieved 1 condition (TSA had defined plans, but had not completed all activities for this condition). Also, TSA's actions completed and those planned have reduced the risks associated with implementing the program. Although DHS asserted that TSA had satisfied all 10 conditions in September 2008, GAO completed its initial assessment in January 2009 and found that TSA had not demonstrated Secure Flight's operational readiness and that the agency had generally not achieved 5 of the 10 statutory conditions. Consistent with the statutory mandate, GAO continued to review the program and, in March 2009, provided a draft of this report to DHS for comment. In the draft report, GAO noted that TSA had made significant progress and had generally achieved 6 statutory conditions, conditionally achieved 3 conditions, and had generally not achieved 1 condition. After receiving the draft report, TSA took additional actions and provided GAO with documentation to demonstrate progress related to 4 conditions. Thus, GAO revised its assessment in this report, as is reflected in the table below.

GAO Assessment of Whether DHS Has Achieved the 10 Statutory Conditions, as of April 2009

Statutory condition topic	Generally achieved	Conditionally achieved ^a	Generally not achieved
System of Due Process (Redress)	X		
Extent of False-Positive Errors (Misidentifications)	X		
Performance of Stress Testing and Efficacy and Accuracy of Search Tools	X		
Establishment of an Internal Oversight Board	X		
Operational Safeguards to Reduce Abuse Opportunities	X		
Substantial Security Measures to Prevent Unauthorized Access by Hackers	X		
Effective Oversight of System Use and Operation	X		
No Specific Privacy Concerns with the System's Technological Architecture	X		
Accommodation of States with Unique Transportation Needs	X		
Appropriateness of Life-Cycle Cost Estimates and Program Plans		X	

Source: GAO analysis.

^aFor conditionally achieved, TSA has completed some key activities and has defined plans for completing remaining activities that, if effectively implemented as planned, should result in a reduced risk of the program experiencing cost, schedule, or performance shortfalls.

Related to the condition that addresses the efficacy and accuracy of search tools, TSA had not yet developed plans to periodically assess the performance of the Secure Flight system's name-matching capabilities, which would help ensure that the system is working as intended. GAO will continue to review the Secure Flight program until all 10 conditions are generally achieved.