



Highlights of [GAO-07-448T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Homeland Security, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA), established in November 2001, has developed and implemented a variety of programs to secure the commercial aviation system. To implement these efforts, TSA funding related to aviation security has totaled about \$20 billion since fiscal year 2004. Other Department of Homeland Security (DHS) components, such as the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and the Science and Technology Directorate (S&T), also play roles in securing commercial aviation. In this testimony, we address the efforts TSA has taken or planned to strengthen aviation security, and the challenges that remain, in three key areas: airline passenger prescreening, airline passenger and checked baggage screening, and air cargo screening. My comments are based on issued GAO reports and testimonies and our preliminary observations from ongoing work on TSA's passenger checkpoint screening procedures and technologies, and staffing standards for Transportation Security Officers (TSO).

What GAO Recommends

In prior reports, GAO has made numerous recommendations designed to strengthen aviation security, including recommendations related to passenger prescreening, passenger and checked baggage screening, and air cargo security. TSA has generally agreed with our recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-448T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or berrickc@gao.gov.

AVIATION SECURITY

Progress Made in Systematic Planning to Guide Key Investment Decisions, but More Work Remains

What GAO Found

DHS and TSA have undertaken numerous initiatives to strengthen the security of the nation's aviation system, and should be commended for these efforts. However, more work remains. Meeting the congressional mandates to screen airline passengers and checked baggage alone was a tremendous challenge. Since that time, TSA has turned its attention to, among other things, strengthening passenger prescreening; more efficiently allocating, deploying, and managing the TSO workforce; strengthening screening procedures; developing and deploying more effective and efficient screening technologies; and improving domestic air cargo security. Some of the actions taken by TSA in these areas were in response to GAO recommendations. For example, consistent with GAO's recommendation to strengthen checked baggage screening, TSA has developed a strategic planning framework and identified several funding and financing strategies for installing optimal checked baggage screening systems.

While TSA has undertaken numerous efforts to strengthen aviation security, GAO found that DHS and TSA could strengthen their risk-based decision-making efforts and collaboration with stakeholders. For example, as TSA moves forward with Secure Flight—TSA's prospective domestic passenger prescreening program—it will need to employ a range of program management disciplines, which we previously found missing, to control program cost, schedule, performance, and privacy risks. TSA has put in place a new management team, but it is too early to know how this change will affect the program's development. In addition, while TSA has tested some proposed modifications to passenger screening procedures at airports to help determine whether to implement the changes, GAO identified that TSA's data collection and analyses could be improved. GAO also found that limited progress has been made in developing and deploying technologies due to planning and funding challenges. For example, limited progress has been made in fielding explosives detection technology at passenger screening checkpoints, and while TSA has begun to systematically plan for the optimal deployment of checked baggage screening systems and to identify funding and financing strategies for installing these systems, the agency has identified that under current investment levels, installation of optimal checked baggage screening systems will not be completed until approximately 2024. Additionally, the federal government and the air cargo industry face several challenges that must be overcome to effectively implement technologies to inspect air cargo, such as ensuring that air cargo can be inspected in a timely manner to meet the delivery time frames of air carriers. GAO also found that more work is needed to fully implement a risk-based approach to securing air cargo, including finalizing a methodology and schedule for completing assessments of air cargo vulnerabilities and critical assets. TSA stated that the agency intends to perform a vulnerability assessment of U.S. air cargo operations and activities, as recommended by GAO, and plans to complete this assessment in 2007.