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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-557T](#), testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, House Committee on Energy and Commerce

Why GAO Did This Study

After the attacks of September 11, 2001, concerns intensified that terrorists would attempt to smuggle a weapon of mass destruction into the United States. One possible method is to use one of the 7 million cargo containers that arrive at our seaports each year. Addressing the potential threat posed by the movement of oceangoing cargo containers falls to the Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Since CBP cannot inspect all arriving cargo containers, it uses a targeting strategy, including an Automated Targeting System. This system targets containers for inspection based on perceived level of risk. In this testimony, GAO summarizes its work on (1) whether the development of CBP's targeting strategy is consistent with recognized key risk management and modeling practices and (2) how well the strategy has been implemented at selected seaports.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CBP incorporate all the key elements of a risk management framework and recognized modeling practices in its targeting strategy and the Automated Targeting System. GAO also recommends, among other things, that CBP improve management controls to better implement the targeting strategy at seaports.

The department cited corrective actions taken or planned to address the issues GAO identified.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-557T.

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

HOMELAND SECURITY

Summary of Challenges Faced in Targeting Oceangoing Cargo Containers for Inspection

What GAO Found

CBP has taken steps to address the terrorism risks posed by oceangoing cargo containers, but its strategy neither incorporates all key elements of a risk management framework nor is it entirely consistent with recognized modeling practices. Actions CBP has taken included refining the Automated Targeting System to target cargo containers that are a high risk for terrorism, or other smuggling, for physical inspection. CBP has also implemented national targeting training and sought to improve the quality and timeliness of manifest information, which is one of the inputs for its Automated Targeting System. However, regarding risk management, CPB has not performed a comprehensive set of assessments vital for determining the level of risk for oceangoing cargo containers and the types of responses necessary to mitigate that risk. Regarding recognized modeling practices, CBP has not subjected the Automated Targeting System to adequate external peer review or testing. It has also not fully implemented a process to randomly examine containers in order to test the targeting strategy. Without incorporating all key elements of a risk management framework and recognized modeling practices, CBP cannot be reasonably sure that its targeting strategy provides the best method to protect against weapons of mass destruction entering the United States at its seaports.

GAO's visits to selected seaports found that the implementation of CBP's targeting strategy faces a number of challenges. Although port officials said that inspectors were able to inspect all containers designated by the Automated Targeting System as high-risk, GAO's requests for documentation raised concerns about the adequacy of CBP's data to document these inspections. CBP lacks an adequate mechanism to test or certify the competence of students who participate in their national targeting training. Additionally, CBP has not been able to fully address longshoremen's safety concerns related to inspection equipment. Addressing these concerns is important to ensure that cargo inspections are conducted safely and efficiently. Challenges to both the development and the implementation of CBP's targeting strategy, if not addressed, may limit the effectiveness of targeting as a tool to help ensure homeland security.

A container ship docks at the Miami seaport.



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection