



Highlights of [GAO-07-499T](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Homeland Security, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is investing billions of dollars in its U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT) program to collect, maintain, and share information on selected foreign nationals who enter and exit the United States. The program uses biometric identifiers (digital fingerscans and photographs) to screen people against watch lists and to verify that a visitor is the person who was issued a visa or other travel document. The program is also to biometrically confirm the individual's departure. For over 3 years, GAO has reported on US-VISIT capability deployments and shortfalls, as well as fundamental limitations in DHS's efforts to define and justify US-VISIT's future direction and to cost-effectively manage the delivery of program capabilities on time and within budget.

GAO was asked to testify on (1) the status of the program's implementation and (2) the program's progress in addressing longstanding management weaknesses. Given where US-VISIT is today and the challenges and uncertainties associated with where it is going, GAO believes that DHS is long overdue in demonstrating that it is pursuing the right US-VISIT solution and that it is managing US-VISIT the right way.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-499T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Randy Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov, or Rich Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

US-VISIT Has Not Fully Met Expectations and Longstanding Program Management Challenges Need to Be Addressed

What GAO Found

After spending almost 4 years and more than \$1 billion, DHS has implemented entry capabilities at most ports of entry; however, it has not implemented a biometric exit capability or a suitable alternative. As of December 2006, US-VISIT had deployed and was operating entry capability at 115 airports, 14 seaports, and 154 of 170 land ports of entry. However, the implementation of a biometric land exit capability is currently not feasible, according to program officials, because the only proven technology available would require additional staffing and infrastructure demands, and cause delays with potential impacts on trade and commerce. Also, testing and analysis of a non-biometric solution identified numerous performance and reliability problems, and such an alternative technology does not meet legislative requirements. DHS believes that advances over the next 5 to 10 years will allow solutions that do not require major infrastructure changes, but the prospects for such technology are uncertain.

DHS continues to face longstanding US-VISIT management challenges and future uncertainties.

- For almost 4 years, DHS has continued to pursue US-VISIT without producing the program's operational and technological context. According to program officials, an immigration and border management strategic plan was drafted in March 2005 to show how US-VISIT is aligned with DHS's organizational mission and to define an overall immigration and border management vision. After almost 2 years, this plan has not yet been approved, but the Acting Director said that it is currently with OMB for approval. At the same time, DHS has launched other major security programs without defining the relationship between US-VISIT and these programs.
- DHS has yet to economically justify its investment in US-VISIT increments or assess their operational impacts. For over 3 years, we reported that the program did not adequately assess the increment's costs and benefits because the assessments were unclear and insufficient, and the cost estimates upon which they were based did not meet key criteria for reliable cost estimating. GAO further reported that the program had not assessed the impact of the entry and exit capabilities on operations and facilities, in part, because the scope of the evaluations performed were too limited.
- DHS has not implemented key acquisition and financial management controls. For example, GAO reported that the program had not effectively overseen contract work performed on its behalf by other DHS and non-DHS agencies, and these agencies did not always establish and implement effective contract oversight activities.

Without these management controls, there is greater risk that US-VISIT will not produce the right solution, and be managed the right way. Accordingly, GAO has made numerous recommendations to address these management challenges.