



Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General

Audit of the Effectiveness of the Checked Baggage Screening System and Procedures Used to Identify and Resolve Threats

(Unclassified Summary)





March 17, 2009

Preface

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) was established by the Homeland Security Act of 2002 (*Public Law 107-296*) by amendment to the Inspector General Act of 1978. This is one of a series of audit, inspection, and special reports prepared as part of our oversight responsibilities to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness within the department.

This report addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the Transportation Security Administration's procedures, equipment, and supervision to ensure that Transportation Security Officers are able to prevent threat items from being introduced into the checked baggage systems of the nation's airports. It is based on interviews with Transportation Security Officers and Transportation Security Administration officials, direct observations, field testing, and a review of applicable documents.

The recommendations herein have been developed to the best knowledge available to our office, and have been discussed in draft with those responsible for implementation. We trust this report will result in more effective, efficient, and economical operations. We express our appreciation to all of those who contributed to the preparation of this report.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard L. Skinner".

Richard L. Skinner
Inspector General

OIG

*Department of Homeland Security
Office of Inspector General*

Background

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is responsible for overseeing aviation security and ensuring the safety of the air traveling public. This includes the screening of checked baggage and safeguarding it from prohibited items. We conducted unannounced, covert testing to evaluate how effective the On-Screen Alarm Resolution Protocol (OSARP) certified operators are at determining whether an object causing an explosives detection system to alarm poses a serious threat and how those threats are being resolved.

We conducted unannounced, covert testing at eight domestic airports, from April 2008 through June 2008. Because TSA has deployed explosives trace detection machines at most of the major domestic airports for operational use, we included locations that were using these technologies in conjunction with trained Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) utilizing the OSARP when we made our airport selections.

Our purpose in testing was to determine whether: (1) TSA's implementation of OSARP is effective; (2) TSA's checked baggage screening procedures and standards are adequate; (3) TSOs are following those screening procedures and standards; and (4) aviation security screening equipment and technologies are functioning properly and as intended to prevent threat items from entering the checked baggage system.

Results of Audit

The number of tests conducted, the names of the airports tested, and the quantitative and qualitative results of our testing are classified. We have shared that information with the department, the Transportation Security Administration, and appropriate congressional committees.

We identified vulnerabilities in the security of checked baggage at the eight domestic airports where we conducted testing. As a result of our testing, we made four recommendations. TSA concurred with three of the four recommendations and concurred in part with the other recommendation. When fully implemented, these recommendations should strengthen the checked baggage screening process.

We gave a copy of our draft report to TSA for review and comment. The unclassified portion of TSA's response to our draft report is summarized below.

TSA's Response

TSA appreciates the work done by OIG on this engagement, and can generally validate OIG's data against TSA's own covert testing programs when TSA analysis rules are applied. While we disagree over OIG's characterizations of Explosives Detection System (EDS) performance and have excluded them from our analysis, the remainder of OIG's data is in line with TSA test results in both agency-run covert testing programs.

OIG's data continues to demonstrate the effectiveness of TSA's checked baggage security system in detecting and removing threat objects.

TSA Covert Assessment Programs Have Similar Results

Aviation Screening Assessment Program

TSA's Aviation Screening Assessment Program (ASAP) is designed to measure screening performance using a realistic standardized test scenario framework. Through ASAP, TSA conducts covert testing of the TSA screening process. The primary purpose is to provide statistical data to identify points of and reasons for failures within the checkpoint and checked baggage screening process. The data generated from ASAP testing is used

to make national recommendations to improve screening performance.

TSA Office of Inspection Testing

TSA's Office of Inspection has a very robust testing program designed to identify systemic vulnerabilities in transportation security systems. Through the Office of Inspection testing program, subject matter experts develop and test specific hypotheses regarding potential system vulnerabilities. These tests are not designed to be performance measures. Rather, they are evaluations of system vulnerabilities that can be used to design countermeasures. When viewed in this light, the qualitative results from these experiments are highly valuable in analyzing vulnerabilities, with conclusions from these experiments informing decisions at the strategic level.

TSA appreciates the work done by OIG on this engagement, which further validates TSA's own testing of the checked baggage screening system effectiveness.

Appendix A
Major Contributors to this Report

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Appendix B
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