



Why This Matters

To secure the Nation's borders while facilitating legitimate trade and travel, United States Customs and Border Protection (CBP) screens incoming shipments for elevated radiation levels, using large-scale radiation detectors called radiation portal monitors. In fiscal year 2011, CBP screened approximately 24.3 million containers coming through all U.S. ports of entry. The Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO) tests, acquires, deploys, and provides maintenance in the first year of operation; CBP provides maintenance after the first year. CBP has the lead for commissioning, operating, and maintaining the radiation portal monitors.

DHS Response

The components concurred with our three recommendations and will identify a single program office responsible for fully coordinating and centrally managing the program; establish guidelines to track and report the utilization of monitors at every seaport; and develop and document a formal collaborative process to ensure that monitor relocation is effectively planned and implemented to meet security needs at seaports.

For Further Information:

Contact our Office of Public Affairs at (202)254-4100, or email us at DHS-OIG.OfficePublicAffairs@oig.dhs.gov

United States Customs and Border Protection's Radiation Portal Monitors at Seaports

What We Determined

DNDO reported that there are currently 444 radiation portal monitors operating at seaports throughout the U.S., which are meeting the requirement to screen all containerized cargo at the 22 seaports with the most container volume. We were unable to determine whether DNDO and CBP initially deployed radiation portal monitors to ensure operational efficiency because the components did not thoroughly document deployment decisions and plans. Although all cargo is being screened, we identified some radiation portal monitors utilized infrequently or not utilized at all.

The components do not fully coordinate or centrally manage the radiation portal monitor program to ensure effective and efficient operations. Specifically, CBP does not consistently gather and review utilization information to ensure that it is fully utilizing all radiation portal monitors. CBP does not always monitor and promptly evaluate changes in the screening environment at seaports to relocate radiation portal monitors as necessary. Finally, DNDO and CBP do not accurately track and monitor their inventory of radiation portal monitors. Given the radiation portal monitors' limited life and the lack of funding for new monitors, CBP and DNDO should better coordinate to fully utilize, promptly relocate, and properly maintain inventory to best use resources and to continue screening of all containerized cargo entering the U.S. seaports.

What We Recommend

The United States Customs and Border Protection Acting Assistant Commissioner, Office of Field Operations, and the Domestic Nuclear Detection Office Assistant Director, Product Acquisition:

1. Identify a single program office responsible for fully coordinating and centrally managing the radiation portal monitor program to ensure effective and efficient operations and future planning. In the office, designate responsible officials to ensure overall program performance, accountability, coordination, and inventory control for the relocation and utilization of the equipment.
2. Establish guidelines to track and report the utilization of radiation portal monitors at every seaport. The guidelines should allow for some exceptions based on unique environmental conditions, yet ensure minimally used equipment is reported and relocated promptly for more efficient utilization.
3. Develop and document a formal collaborative process to ensure that radiation portal monitor relocation is effectively planned and implemented to meet security needs at seaports. The process should ensure that, in making these decisions, all relevant data is reported and analyzed.