Office of Inspector General

Implementation and Coordination of TSA's Secure Flight Program

Why This Matters

Following the the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, aircraft operators performed passenger prescreening as required under TSA security directives. In October 2008, TSA began implementing the Secure Flight program to assume passenger prescreening. The program was intended to provide consistent and accurate passenger prescreening, while minimizing false matches and protecting personally identifiable information. Under this program, TSA receives specific passenger and non-traveler data from the airlines and conducts matching against the Government's watch list. TSA then transmits a boarding pass printing result back to the aircraft operator so a boarding pass can be issued.

DHS Response

TSA concurred with Recommendations 1 and 3 and did not concur with Recommendations 2 and 4.

What We Determined

Since Secure Flight assumed responsibility for passenger prescreening from aircraft operators, the program has provided more consistent passenger prescreening. Secure Flight has a defined system and processes to conduct watch list matching. To ensure that aircraft operators follow established procedures, Secure Flight monitors records and uses its discretion to forward issues for compliance investigation. Secure Flight also includes privacy safeguards to protect passenger personal data and sensitive watch list records and information. Once Secure Flight assumed advanced passenger prescreening from aircraft operators, program focus shifted toward addressing emerging threats through multiple initiatives.

We are making four recommendations to identify and eliminate system overrides, prioritize passenger data, standardize compliance, and improve communication and collaboration with partners.

What We Recommend

Director, Secure Flight program, Transportation Security Administration:

1) Identify how and when aircraft operators override an inhibited boarding pass printing result and implement corrective action to eliminate unauthorized overrides by aircraft operators.

2) Ensure that aircraft operators prioritize Secure Flight passenger data appropriately and receive an accurate, updated boarding pass printing result when aircraft operators submit changes.

3) In coordination with the Office of Security Operations Compliance Programs and the Office of Global Strategies establish formal guidance that clearly defines Secure Flight program processes for reporting aircraft operator compliance issues to the Office of Security Operations and Office of Global Strategies.

4) The Administrator of the Transportation Security Administration, in coordination with the Secure Flight program develop a communication strategy to formalize coordination and collaboration with federal government and private industry partners to ensure clarity when developing and implementing new initiatives.