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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-03-1150T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

In the 2 years since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the security of our nation's civil aviation system has assumed renewed urgency, and efforts to strengthen aviation security have received a great deal of congressional attention. On November 19, 2001, the Congress enacted the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA), which created the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) within the Department of Transportation (DOT) and defined its primary responsibility as ensuring security in aviation as well as in other modes of transportation. The Homeland Security Act, passed on November 25, 2002, transferred TSA to the new Department of Homeland Security, which assumed overall responsibility for aviation security. GAO was asked to describe the progress that has been made since September 11 to strengthen aviation security, the potential vulnerabilities that remain, and the longer-term management and organizational challenges to sustaining enhanced aviation security.

What GAO Recommends

In prior reports and testimonies, listed at the end of this statement, GAO has made numerous recommendations to strengthen aviation security and to improve the management of federal aviation security organizations and functions.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-1150T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham, Ph.D., at (202) 512-2834 or dillinghamg@gao.gov.

AVIATION SECURITY

Progress Since September 11, 2001, and the Challenges Ahead

What GAO Found

Since September 11, 2001, TSA has made considerable progress in meeting congressional mandates designed to increase aviation security. By the end of 2002, the agency had hired and deployed about 65,000 passenger and baggage screeners, federal air marshals, and others, and it was using explosives detection equipment to screen about 90 percent of all checked baggage. TSA is also initiating or developing efforts that focus on the use of technology and information to advance security. One effort under development, the next-generation Computer-Assisted Passenger Prescreening System (CAPPS II), would use national security and commercial databases to identify passengers who could pose risks for additional screening. Concerns about privacy rights will need to be addressed as this system moves toward implementation.

Although TSA has focused on ensuring that bombs and other threat items are not carried onto planes by passengers or in their luggage, vulnerabilities remain in air cargo, general aviation, and airport perimeter security. Each year, an estimated 12.5 million tons of cargo are transported on all-cargo and passenger planes, yet very little air cargo is screened for explosives. We have previously recommended, and the industry has suggested, that TSA use a risk-management approach to set priorities as it works with the industry to determine the next steps in strengthening aviation security.

TSA faces longer-term management and organizational challenges to sustaining enhanced aviation security that include (1) developing and implementing a comprehensive risk management approach, (2) paying for increased aviation security needs and controlling costs, (3) establishing effective coordination among the many entities involved in aviation security, (4) strategically managing its workforce, and (5) building a results-oriented culture within the new Department of Homeland Security. TSA has begun to respond to recommendations we have made addressing many of these challenges, and we have other studies in progress.

Air Cargo Remains Vulnerable to Terrorist Threats

