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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-928T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Government Reform and Oversight, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

Securing and defending U.S. airspace is an interagency mission that depends on close interagency coordination and information sharing. GAO was asked to review (1) the threat assessment for U.S. aviation, (2) violations of restricted airspace since September 11, 2001, (3) agencies' individual or coordinated steps to secure U.S. aviation, and (4) interagency policies and procedures to manage the response to restricted airspace violations. GAO will issue a classified report responding to this request later this year. To keep this testimony unclassified, GAO focused on the latter three questions.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommended that the Secretaries of Defense, Transportation, and Homeland Security strengthen the interagency process for managing the response to violations of restricted airspace by determining whether an organization should be in charge, developing interagency policies and procedures, information sharing protocols, and common definitions. DHS and DOD disagreed that one agency should be in charge, largely from command and control concerns. DHS concurred or partially concurred with the other recommendations; DOD nonconcurred with most of the rest. The Department of Transportation concurred with GAO's recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-928T](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-928T).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Davi M. D'Agostino, (202) 512-5431, [dagostinod@gao.gov](mailto:dagostinod@gao.gov).

## HOMELAND SECURITY

# Agency Resources Address Violations of Restricted Airspace, but Management Improvements Are Needed

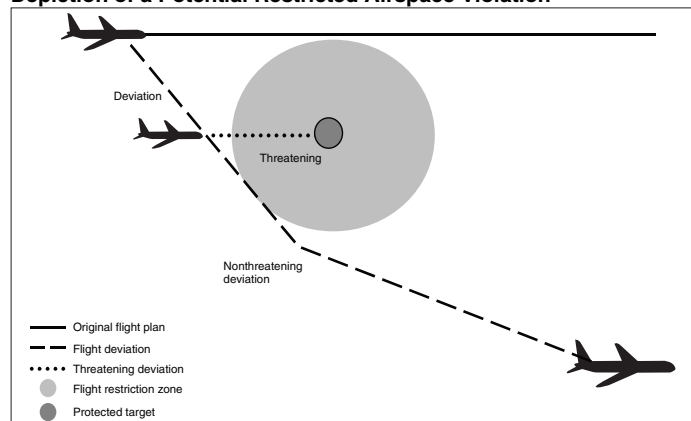
## What GAO Found

The Federal Aviation Administration reported about 3,400 violations of restricted airspace from September 12, 2001, to December 31, 2004, most of which were committed by general aviation pilots. Violations can occur because (1) pilots may divert from their flight plan to avoid bad weather, (2) the Administration may establish newly restricted airspace with little warning, and pilots in the air may be unaware of the new restrictions, or (3) pilots do not check for notices of restrictions, as required. Also, terrorists may deliberately enter restricted airspace to test the government's response or carry out an attack.

Federal agencies have acted individually or have coordinated to enhance aviation security. For example, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) established a national operations center that disseminates operational- and intelligence-related information, and has enhanced passenger and checked baggage screening, secured cockpit doors, and assessed the risk to some, but not all, commercial airports. Also, few general aviation airport owners have conducted risk assessments. The North American Aerospace Defense Command's mission was expanded to include monitoring domestic air traffic and conducting air patrols. Collectively, the agencies are operating the National Capital Region Coordination Center to secure the National Capital Region.

GAO identified gaps in the simultaneous, time-critical, multi-agency response to airspace violations. While it may not be possible to prevent all violations or deter all attacks, GAO identified some gaps in policies and procedures. Specifically, the agencies were operating without (1) an organization in the lead, (2) fully developed interagency policies and procedures for the airspace violations response teleconferencing system, (3) information sharing protocols and procedures, or (4) accepted definitions of a violation. As a result, opportunities may be missed to enhance the security of U.S. aviation.

### Depiction of a Potential Restricted Airspace Violation



Source: GAO.