

GAO
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-10-366T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), whose reauthorization is the subject of today's hearing, plays a vital role in advancing transportation safety by investigating accidents, determining their causes, issuing safety recommendations, and conducting safety studies. To support the agency's mission, NTSB's Training Center provides training to NTSB investigators and others. NTSB's 2006 reauthorization legislation mandates an annual review by GAO, and from 2006 through 2008, GAO made 21 recommendations to NTSB that address its management, information technology (IT), accident investigation criteria, safety studies, and Training Center use. This testimony addresses NTSB's progress in implementing GAO's recommendations that it (1) follow leading management practices, (2) conduct aspects of its accident investigations and safety studies more efficiently, and (3) increase the use of its Training Center. The testimony also discusses (4) changes NTSB seeks in its 2010 reauthorization proposal.

This testimony is based on GAO's assessment from July 2009 to January 2010 of plans and procedures NTSB developed to address these recommendations. NTSB provided technical comments that GAO incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-10-366T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham, Ph.D., at (202) 512-2834 or dillingham@gao.gov.

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Issues Related to the 2010 Reauthorization

What GAO Found

NTSB has fully implemented or made significant progress in adopting leading management practices in all areas where GAO made prior recommendations. Since 2008, NTSB has revised several of its planning documents, including its agencywide strategic plan; improved information security; and obligated money to implement a full cost accounting system. NTSB has also taken steps to improve the diversity of its workforce and management. However, women and minorities were less well represented in NTSB's fiscal year 2008 workforce than in the federal government, and no minorities are among NTSB's 15 senior executives. A lack of diversity among top managers can limit the variety of perspectives and approaches to policy development and decision making at an agency.

With the adoption of criteria for selecting highway and marine accidents to investigate, NTSB has established criteria for all transportation modes. NTSB is also streamlining and increasing its use of technology in closing out recommendations. NTSB has three safety studies in progress and would like to broaden the term "safety studies" to include not only its current studies of multiple accidents, but also the research it does for other, smaller safety-related reports and data inquiries.

NTSB has continued to increase the use of its Training Center—from 10 percent in fiscal year 2006 to 80 percent in fiscal year 2009. As a result, revenues have increased and the center's overall deficit has declined from about \$3.9 million in fiscal year 2005 to about \$1.9 million in fiscal year 2009.

In its 2010 reauthorization proposal, NTSB seeks substantive changes to its existing authorizing legislation, including explicit statutory authority to investigate incidents in all modes and reduced statutory requirements for investigating rail and maritime accidents. Both changes would increase NTSB's investigatory discretion. Such discretion would allow NTSB to select incidents with the greatest potential to improve safety, yet decisions based on discretion may be less transparent than those based on criteria. Striking the right balance between discretionary and criteria-based investigations will be important to ensure that NTSB's resources can be used for the work with the greatest potential to enhance transportation safety.

NTSB Investigative Modes: Marine, Highway, Aviation, Railroad, Pipeline



Source: GAO.