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AVIATION SECURITY

TSA Updated Screener Training to Address Risks, but Should Enhance Processes to Monitor Compliance

GAO Highlights

Highlights of GAO-20-219, a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

TSA is responsible for screening millions of airline passengers and their baggage each day at the nation's commercial airports for items that could threaten aircraft and passengers. In carrying out its mission, TSA requires its screener workforce to complete various trainings on screening procedures and technologies. TSA updated its security screening procedures and technologies in recent years to address risks identified through covert tests in 2015 and reports of emerging threats.

The TSA Modernization Act of 2018 included a provision for GAO to examine the effectiveness of TSA's updated screener training. This report addresses: (1) changes TSA made to screener training since 2015; (2) how TSA updates and evaluates screener training; and (3) how TSA ensures screener compliance with training requirements.

GAO analyzed TSA documentation on training development, compliance monitoring, and a non-generalizable sample of six recently updated training courses—selected to reflect a range of training types and topics. GAO also reviewed TSA data on airport screener training compliance rates from fiscal years 2016 through 2018, and interviewed TSA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations, including that TSA (1) document its process for monitoring screener training compliance and (2) monitor screener compliance data across fiscal years. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

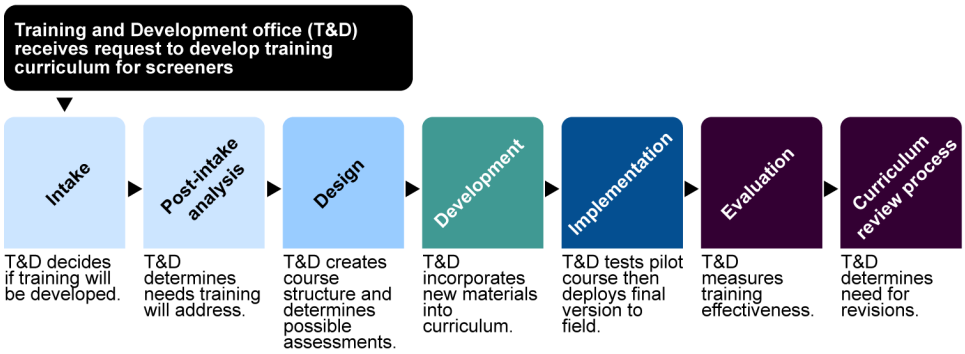
View GAO-20-219. For more information, contact William Russell at (202) 512-8777 or russellw@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Since 2015, the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Transportation Security Administration (TSA) developed and updated screener training to address potential risks to commercial airports identified through covert testing and reports on emerging threats. From May 2015 through June 2019, TSA identified 62 potential risks that warranted review for a potential change in training. TSA made training changes in response to 56 of the identified risks—affecting 40 different training courses. TSA also responded to risks by developing or updating job aids or briefings for screeners.

TSA uses established models for developing, updating, and evaluating its screener training. The figure below shows TSA's process for updating and evaluating its screener training, in accordance with a training development model that is widely accepted and used across the federal government.

Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Screener Training Development Process



Source: GAO analysis of Transportation Security Administration (TSA) information. | GAO-20-219

TSA relies on an online database to monitor screener compliance in completing required training at the nation's commercial airports. However, TSA has not documented its process for monitoring screener training compliance, including for analyzing compliance data and reporting and addressing instances of noncompliance at airports. Moreover, while TSA monitors airport compliance rates in a given year, it does not analyze the data across fiscal years for potential trends in noncompliance by individual airports that may warrant corrective action at the headquarters level. GAO found that in fiscal years 2016 and 2017, screeners at 435 commercial airports met TSA's 90 percent target compliance rate, while in 2018, five airports had compliance rates well below this target, dropping 15 to 26 percentage points from the prior year. TSA officials stated they were unaware of this development. By documenting its screener training compliance monitoring process and monitoring screener training compliance data across fiscal years, TSA would be better positioned to ensure it is aware of potential noncompliance trends warranting corrective action at the headquarters level.