

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-108085](#), a report to the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal real property has been on GAO's High Risk List since 2003, in part due to threats to federal facilities. FPS, within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is responsible for protecting thousands of federal facilities. For fiscal year 2024, FPS had contract guards at about 2,500 facilities at a cost of \$1.7 billion.

This report discusses the extent to which (1) FPS contract guards detect certain types of prohibited items at selected federal facilities, (2) FPS uses its covert testing data to improve detection rates, and (3) the Post Tracking System has improved oversight of contract guards.

GAO conducted 27 covert tests at a nongeneralizable sample of 14 federal facilities and analyzed data from FPS's covert tests. GAO selected federal facilities based on public access; location; and size, among other factors. GAO also analyzed numerous Post Tracking System documents and interviewed stakeholders, including FPS officials, federal tenants, guard unions, and security guard companies.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to FPS to collect and use better covert testing data to improve guard performance. GAO also recommends that the DHS Chief Information Officer determine whether to terminate and replace the Post Tracking System, or make corrective actions to the existing system, including a schedule for providing tenants with timely communication of guard shortages. DHS agreed with all four recommendations.

View [GAO-25-108085](#). For more information, contact David Marroni, (202) 512-2834 or MarroniD@gao.gov, or Howard Arp, (202) 512-6722 or ArpJ@gao.gov.

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FEDERAL PROTECTIVE SERVICE

Actions Needed to Address Critical Guard Oversight and Information System Problems

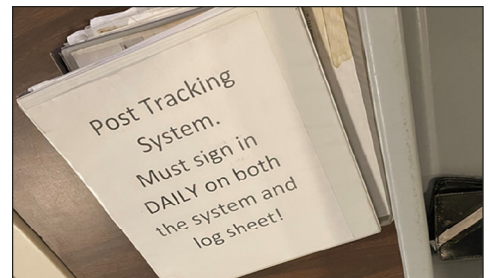
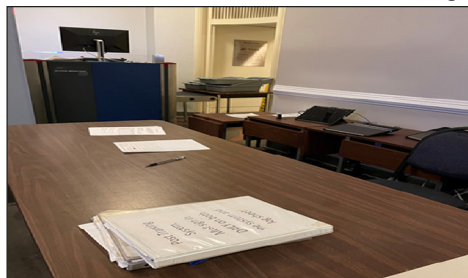
What GAO Found

The Federal Protective Service (FPS) oversees about 13,000 contract guards who screen visitors entering federal facilities for prohibited items. FPS contract guards detected prohibited items in 14 of GAO's 27 covert tests. During the tests, GAO investigators attempted to bring a bag into selected federal facilities containing one of the following three prohibited items—a baton, pepper spray, or a multi-purpose tool with a knife. Furthermore, GAO analysis of nearly 500 FPS covert tests found that contract guards did not detect prohibited items in about half of FPS tests from 2020 through 2023.

FPS collects data about its covert tests, but data reliability issues prevent FPS from using that information to improve detection rates. This is due in part to the information (1) being reported inconsistently, (2) not identifying specific and actionable causes of guards failing to detect prohibited items, and (3) not consistently resulting in appropriate guard training targeted at addressing cause. Collecting better data on its covert tests, analyzing those data, and using what it learns from that analysis could help FPS improve guard performance in detecting prohibited items.

FPS deployed the Post Tracking System in 2018 to improve oversight of the contract guard program. However, 6 years later, the system is beset with problems. In April 2022 FPS testing, PTS did not complete 782 of 1,487 selected tasks to meet system requirements. FPS officials said that most of the issues were resolved, but FPS did not provide supporting documentation. Accordingly, the paper-based system that the Post Tracking System was designed to replace remains the system of record for FPS.

Instructions for Guards at a Federal Building



Source: GAO (photo). | [GAO-25-108085](#)

This, in turn, means that the system is not meeting the mission requirement of remotely verifying in real time that posts are staffed by qualified guards. Continuing to rely on the antiquated, paper-based guard tracking process adversely affected communication with tenants on guard shortages. A lack of guards led to office closings and impaired service to the public—according to agency officials, since 2022, the Internal Revenue Service closed 30 Taxpayer Assistance Centers for a full day, and the Social Security Administration closed offices in 510 separate instances. While guard shortages would have still occurred, officials from those tenant agencies said that real-time notification of guard shortages, like that promised by the Post Tracking System, could have allowed them to better react to the guard shortages.