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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-242](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

To help strengthen aviation security after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the Congress expanded the size and mission of the Federal Air Marshal Service (the Service) and located the Service within the newly created Transportation Security Administration (TSA). Between November 2001 and July 1, 2002, the Service grew from fewer than 50 air marshals to thousands, and its mission expanded to include the protection of domestic as well as international flights. In March 2003, the Service, with TSA, merged into the new Department of Homeland Security (DHS); and in November 2003, it was transferred from TSA and merged into DHS's Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). GAO looked at operational and management control issues that emerged during the rapid expansion of the Service, specifically addressing its (1) background check procedures and training; (2) management information, policies, and procedures; and (3) challenges likely to result from its mergers into DHS and ICE.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations designed to improve the Service's data on flight duty and information on separations. DHS agreed with GAO's recommendations and expressed a commitment to continuous improvement as the Service moves forward.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-242.

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

AVIATION SECURITY

Federal Air Marshal Service Is Addressing Challenges of Its Expanded Mission and Workforce, but Additional Actions Needed

What GAO Found

To deploy its expanded workforce by July 1, 2002, a deadline set by the Deputy Secretary of Transportation, the Service used expedited procedures to obtain interim secret security clearances for air marshal candidates and provided abbreviated training for them. These procedures allowed candidates with interim clearances to work until they received their final top-secret clearances. Because of a governmentwide demand for clearances, nearly a quarter of the active air marshals had not received their top-secret clearances as of July 2003; but by October 2003, only about 3 percent were awaiting their top-secret clearances. To train its expanded workforce before the Deputy Secretary's deployment deadline, the Service incrementally revised and abbreviated its curriculum.

The Service has begun to develop management information, policies, and procedures to support its expanded workforce and mission, but it has not yet completed this major effort. For example, it replaced a manual system for scheduling flight duty with an automated system, but it has not yet developed an automated means to monitor the effectiveness of its scheduling controls designed to prevent air marshals' fatigue. In addition, it has gathered and used information on potential security incidents and on air marshals' reasons for separation from the Service to improve its operations and workforce management. However, some of this information is not clear or detailed enough to facilitate follow-up. Finally, the Service has implemented policies needed to support its expansion.

The Service is likely to face challenges in implementing changes resulting from its mergers into DHS and ICE, including changes to its roles, responsibilities, and training and to its procedures for coordinating with TSA's security organizations, as well as administrative changes. GAO's recent work on mergers and organizational transformations proposes several key practices—set implementation goals, establish a communication strategy, and involve employees to obtain their ideas—and associated implementation steps that could help the Service implement such changes.

Training Air Marshal Candidates to Shoot from a Seated Position



Source: Federal Air Marshall Service.