

GAO
Accountability · Integrity · Reliability

Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-203](#), a report to the Honorable Peter A. DeFazio, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Federal Air Marshal Service (FAMS) has undergone a number of changes in recent years, including a 2003 transfer from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Bureau (ICE), and a 2005 transfer from ICE back to TSA. A key aspect of federal air marshals' operating procedures is the discreet movement through airports as they check in for their flight, transit screening checkpoints, and board the aircraft. This report discusses FAMS's (1) transfer to ICE and key practices that could facilitate its return to TSA, and (2) management of mission-related incidents that affect air marshals' ability to operate discreetly.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) adopt key practices for successful mergers and transformations, to include developing an overall strategy with implementation goals and milestones and a communication strategy. GAO is also recommending that the Secretary direct FAMS to improve management controls for recording, tracking, and addressing mission incidents and communicating the outcome of actions taken to address them.

DHS reviewed a draft of this report and agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-203.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cathleen A. Berrick at (202) 512-8777 or berrickc@gao.gov.

AVIATION SECURITY

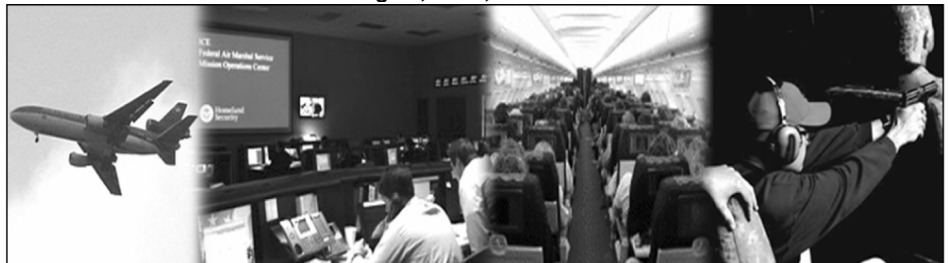
Federal Air Marshal Service Could Benefit from Improved Planning and Controls

What GAO Found

DHS made limited progress in achieving the intended objectives of its transfer of FAMS to ICE, which included (1) developing a "surge" capacity through cross-training ICE agents, and (2) enhancing federal air marshals' career opportunities. Specifically, DHS had developed some surge capacity by cross-training a number of ICE agents but suspended these efforts in October 2004 in response to congressional concerns that the cross-training was an ineffective use of resources and training. DHS indicated that it would continue to support the surge effort, but had not determined whether and when it would resume cross-training to support this initiative. Further, although DHS recognized that federal air marshals' career opportunities were limited, it had not developed plans to expand them through investigative or other duties. Moreover, DHS had not determined how these transition objectives would be met because it had not developed an overall strategy to include implementation goals, measures, and a timeline to help target performance shortfalls and suggest midcourse corrections—a key practice for a successful transformation. DHS also had not developed a communication strategy to create shared expectations and report related progress on the transition to employees and other stakeholders—another key practice. With its return of FAMS to TSA, DHS's prior experience in transferring FAMS to ICE can provide useful information on key practices to consider in effecting a successful transition.

FAMS lacks adequate management controls to help ensure that mission-related incidents that affect air marshals' ability to operate discreetly are recorded, tracked, and addressed. For example, FAMS has not developed a written policy that establishes criteria for when and how federal air marshals are to complete mission reports on incidents they encounter during their missions. In addition, FAMS lacks adequate controls to ensure that the outcome of actions taken to address these incidents was communicated to the federal air marshals who originally reported them. Not providing such information may serve to discourage federal air marshals from submitting future reports. FAMS officials have acknowledged that FAMS lacks written policies to govern the use and management of mission reports and stated that FAMS plans to develop such policies in the near future.

Federal Air Marshals Protect Passengers, Crew, and Aircraft



Source: ICE and FAMS.