

Highlights of [GAO-05-663](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security and Claims, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

While the Enhanced Border Security and Visa Protection Act repealed a 45 minute standard for inspecting international passengers, minimizing wait times at airports remains an area of concern for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). Shortly after its creation in March 2003, CBP assumed inspection functions from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the U.S. Customs Service, and the Department of Agriculture. The new agency's priority missions are to prevent terrorism and to facilitate travel and trade. To assess CBP's efforts to minimize wait times for international air passengers while ensuring security, this report answers the following questions: (1) What are the wait times at the 20 U.S. international airports that receive most of the international traffic and what factors affect wait times? (2) What steps have airports and airlines taken to minimize passenger wait times? (3) How has CBP managed staffing to minimize wait times across airports?

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that CBP address weaknesses in its staffing model, and determine milestones for the completion of its staffing model and cross-training activities.

CBP reviewed a draft of this report and concurred in part with GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-663.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Richard M. Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.

INTERNATIONAL AIR PASSENGERS

Staffing Model for Airport Inspections Personnel Can Be Improved

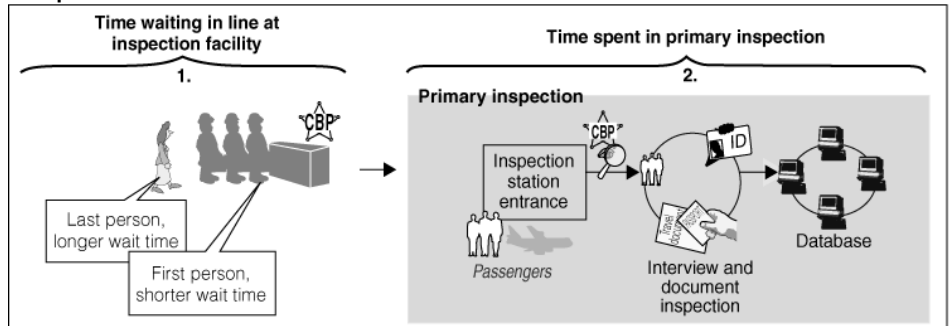
What GAO Found

The amount of time passengers from international locations have to wait before completing CBP inspections to enter the United States varies within and across airports. On average, CBP processed passengers within 45 minutes during the 2-month period for which data were available, although some flights had significantly longer wait times. Based on our observations and analysis as well as our discussions with airport and CBP officials, we determined that the primary factors affecting wait time are passenger volume, the number of inspection stations available at an airport, and the number of CBP officers available to conduct inspections. These factors, in different combinations at each airport, affect passenger wait times.

Three of the five international airports we visited had built new or expanded federal inspection facilities to accommodate future growth in passenger volume and minimize wait times for internationally arriving passengers. Additionally, some airports assigned staff to assist passengers in preparing documentation to minimize wait times. Airline officials we spoke to acknowledged that large volumes of arriving passengers may increase wait times, but said that, to accommodate market demand, airlines do not spread flight arrivals throughout the day.

CBP, in its efforts to minimize passenger wait times at airports, has taken steps to increase the efficient use of existing staff at airports. For example, CBP is cross-training its officers so that they can conduct different types of inspections. CBP is also developing a staffing model to allocate staff among its ports. However, the new model fails to address weaknesses identified in assessments of staffing models used previously by Customs and INS, such as not including wait times as a performance measure. CBP also has not developed milestones for completing its staffing model and cross-training program at all ports. Until these weaknesses are addressed, CBP will be hampered in forming a basis for management decision-making concerning staff allocation and staff needs and providing budget justifications.

Components of CBP's Calculated Wait Time



Source: GAO analysis of CBP data.