

Why GAO Did This Study

Within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the U.S. Coast Guard manage the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) program, which requires maritime workers to complete background checks and obtain a biometric identification card to gain unescorted access to secure areas of regulated maritime facilities. As requested, GAO evaluated the extent to which (1) TWIC processes for enrollment, background checking, and use are designed to provide reasonable assurance that unescorted access to these facilities is limited to qualified individuals; and (2) the effectiveness of TWIC has been assessed. GAO reviewed program documentation, such as the concept of operations, and conducted site visits to four TWIC centers, conducted covert tests at several selected U.S. ports chosen for their size in terms of cargo volume, and interviewed agency officials. The results of these visits and tests are not generalizable but provide insights and perspective about the TWIC program. This is a public version of a sensitive report. Information DHS deemed sensitive has been redacted.

What GAO Recommends

Among other things, GAO recommends that DHS assess TWIC program internal controls to identify needed corrective actions, assess TWIC's effectiveness, and use the information to identify effective and cost-efficient methods for meeting program objectives. DHS concurred with all of the recommendations.

[View GAO-11-657](#) or key components. For more information, contact Stephen M. Lord at (202) 512-4379 or lords@gao.gov.

TRANSPORTATION WORKER IDENTIFICATION CREDENTIAL

Internal Control Weaknesses Need to Be Corrected to Help Achieve Security Objectives

What GAO Found

Internal control weaknesses governing the enrollment, background checking, and use of TWIC potentially limit the program's ability to provide reasonable assurance that access to secure areas of Maritime Transportation Security Act (MTSA)-regulated facilities is restricted to qualified individuals. To meet the stated program purpose, TSA designed TWIC program processes to facilitate the issuance of TWICs to maritime workers. However, TSA did not assess the internal controls designed and in place to determine whether they provided reasonable assurance that the program could meet defined mission needs for limiting access to only qualified individuals. GAO found that internal controls in the enrollment and background checking processes are not designed to provide reasonable assurance that (1) only qualified individuals can acquire TWICs; (2) adjudicators follow a process with clear criteria for applying discretionary authority when applicants are found to have extensive criminal convictions; or (3) once issued a TWIC, TWIC-holders have maintained their eligibility. Further, internal control weaknesses in TWIC enrollment, background checking, and use could have contributed to the breach of MTSA-regulated facilities during covert tests conducted by GAO's investigators. During covert tests of TWIC use at several selected ports, GAO's investigators were successful in accessing ports using counterfeit TWICs, authentic TWICs acquired through fraudulent means, and false business cases (i.e., reasons for requesting access). Conducting a control assessment of the TWIC program's processes to address existing weaknesses could better position DHS to achieve its objectives in controlling unescorted access to the secure areas of MTSA-regulated facilities and vessels.

DHS has not assessed the TWIC program's effectiveness at enhancing security or reducing risk for MTSA-regulated facilities and vessels. Further, DHS has not demonstrated that TWIC, as currently implemented and planned, is more effective than prior approaches used to limit access to ports and facilities, such as using facility specific identity credentials with business cases. Conducting an effectiveness assessment that further identifies and assesses TWIC program security risks and benefits could better position DHS and policymakers to determine the impact of TWIC on enhancing maritime security. Further, DHS did not conduct a risk-informed cost-benefit analysis that considered existing security risks, and it has not yet completed a regulatory analysis for the upcoming rule on using TWIC with card readers. Conducting a regulatory analysis using the information from the internal control and effectiveness assessments as the basis for evaluating the costs, benefits, security risks, and corrective actions needed to implement the TWIC program, could help DHS ensure that the TWIC program is more effective and cost-efficient than existing measures or alternatives at enhancing maritime security.