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BORDER SECURITY

Despite Progress, Weaknesses in Traveler Inspections Exist at Our Nation's Ports of Entry

Statement of Richard M. Stana, Director
Homeland Security and Justice Issues

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-08-329T, a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

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Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is responsible for keeping terrorists and other dangerous people from entering the country while also facilitating the cross-border movement of millions of travelers. CBP carries out this responsibility at 326 air, sea, and land ports of entry. In response to a congressional request, GAO examined CBP traveler inspection efforts, the progress made, and the challenges that remain in staffing and training at ports of entry, and the progress CBP has made in developing strategic plans and performance measures for its traveler inspection program. To conduct its work, GAO reviewed and analyzed CBP data and documents related to inspections, staffing, and training, interviewed managers and officers, observed inspections at eight major air and land ports of entry, and tested inspection controls at eight small land ports of entry. GAO's testimony is based on a report GAO issued November 5, 2007.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made recommendations aimed at enhancing internal controls in the inspection process, mechanisms for measuring training provided and new officer proficiency, and a performance measure for apprehending inadmissible aliens and other violators. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) concurred with GAO's recommendations. DHS said that CBP is taking steps to address the recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on GAO-08-329T. For more information, contact Richard Stana at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

CBP has had some success in identifying inadmissible aliens and other violators, but weaknesses in its operations increase the potential that terrorists and inadmissible travelers could enter the country. In fiscal year 2006, CBP turned away over 200,000 inadmissible aliens and interdicted other violators. Although CBP's goal is to interdict all violators, CBP estimated that several thousand inadmissible aliens and other violators entered the country though ports of entry in fiscal year 2006. Weaknesses in 2006 inspection procedures, such as not verifying the citizenship and admissibility of each traveler, contribute to failed inspections. Although CBP took actions to address these weaknesses, subsequent follow-up work conducted by GAO months after CBP's actions found that weaknesses such as those described above still existed. In July 2007, CBP issued detailed procedures for conducting inspections including requiring field office managers to assess compliance with these procedures. However, CBP has not established an internal control to ensure field office managers share their assessments with CBP headquarters to help ensure that the new procedures are consistently implemented across all ports of entry and reduce the risk of failed traveler inspections.

CBP developed a staffing model that estimates it needs up to several thousand more staff. Field office managers said that staffing shortages affected their ability to carry out anti-terrorism programs and created other vulnerabilities in the inspections process. CBP recognizes that officer attrition has impaired its ability to attain budgeted staffing levels and is in the process of developing a strategy to help curb attrition. CBP has made progress in developing training programs; however, it does not measure the extent to which it provides training to all who need it and whether new officers demonstrate proficiency in required skills.

CBP issued a strategic plan for operations at its ports of entry and has collected performance data that can be used to measure its progress in achieving its strategic goals. However, current performance measures do not gauge CBP effectiveness in apprehending inadmissible aliens and other violators, a key strategic goal.

Vehicle Lanes at the San Ysidro Port of Entry

Passenger Lines at JFK International Airport

Source: GAO.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in today's field hearing in El Paso Texas, to discuss the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to inspect travelers at our nation's ports of entry.[1] My statement today is based on our November 5, 2007, report[2] that describes the progress made by CBP in inspecting travelers at air and land ports of entry and the challenges that remain.[3]

The U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)—a major component within DHS—is the lead federal agency in charge of inspecting travelers seeking to enter the United States at 326 air, land, and sea ports of entry. CBP officers, who number about 17,600 at these ports of entry, play a critical role in carrying out this responsibility. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, their role has involved increased emphasis on countering threats posed by terrorists and others attempting to enter the country with fraudulent or altered travel documents. Intelligence officials believe that the United States will face a persistent and evolving terrorist threat and that the terrorist group al Qaeda will intensify its efforts to put operatives here.

In addition to its homeland security responsibilities, CBP is responsible for preventing inadmissible aliens, criminals, and inadmissible goods from entering the country. Doing so is a difficult task given the high volume of travelers and goods that enter the country. For example, officers frequently carry out their responsibilities with little time to make decisions about admitting individuals into the country because they also face

[1] Ports of entry are government-designated locations where CBP inspects persons and goods to determine whether they may be lawfully admitted into the country. A land port of entry may have more than one border crossing point where CBP inspects travelers for admissibility into the United States.

[2] See GAO, *Border Security: Despite Progress, Weaknesses in Traveler Inspections Exist at Our Nation's Ports of Entry*, GAO-08-219 (Washington D.C.: Nov. 5, 2007).

[3] Our November 2007 report (GAO-08-219) is the public version of a For Official Use Only report that we issued on October 5, 2007. This report contained sensitive information about CBP traveler inspection efforts, including information on the techniques used to carry out inspections, data on the number of inadmissible aliens and other violators that enter the country each year, and data on staffing at ports of entry. See GAO, *Border Security: Despite Progress, Weaknesses in Traveler Inspections Exist at Our Nation's Ports of Entry*, GAO-08-123SU (Washington D.C.: Oct. 5, 2007).

pressure to facilitate the cross-border movement of millions of legitimate travelers and billions of dollars in international trade.

When CBP was created in March 2003, it represented a merger of components from three departments—the U.S. Customs Service,[4] the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service,[5] and the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service.[6] As part of the merger, CBP moved forward with an approach that was to allow a CBP officer, with the proper cross-training, to carry out homeland security as well as traditional customs and immigration responsibilities. For example, former customs inspectors would be trained and work on tasks traditionally done by immigration inspectors and vice versa. The CBP officer would also be capable of referring agricultural violations to agricultural specialists. By training officers from legacy agencies to perform both the customs and immigration functions, CBP aimed to have a well-trained and well-integrated workforce to carry out the range of the agency's missions.

In July 2003, we reported on vulnerabilities and inefficiencies in traveler inspections.[7] Given the critical role that CBP plays in homeland security, you asked us to review the progress CBP has made in strengthening its ability to inspect travelers arriving at the nation's international airports and land borders. In response, on November 5, 2007, we issued a report that addressed the following questions:

- What success and challenges has CBP had in interdicting inadmissible aliens and other violators[8] at its ports of entry?

[4] U.S. Customs Service was in the U.S. Department of the Treasury. Customs inspectors were primarily responsible for inspecting cargo and goods.

[5] U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service was in the Department of Justice. Immigration inspectors were responsible for processing people traveling across the border.

[6] Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service was in the Department of Agriculture. Unlike the Customs Service and the Immigration and Naturalization Service, which were moved to DHS in its entirety, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service continues to exist within the Department of Agriculture and retains responsibility for conducting, among other things, veterinary inspections of live imported animals, establishing policy for inspections and quarantines, and providing risk analysis.

[7] See GAO, *Land Ports of Entry: Vulnerabilities and Inefficiencies in the Inspections Process*, GAO-03-782 (Washington, D.C.: July 2003).

[8] Other violators include individuals seeking to enter the country who are not in compliance with the laws and regulations for entry, including immigration, customs, and agricultural requirements.

- What progress has CBP made in improving staffing and training at its ports of entry and how successful has it been in carrying out these workforce programs?

- What progress and problems has CBP encountered in setting goals and performance measures for its traveler inspection program?

To address the questions above, we analyzed information and data on CBP's traveler inspections, staffing, and training at ports of entry. We reviewed CBP policies and procedures for the traveler inspection program as well as other documents related to traveler inspection efforts. We interviewed CBP officials on the status of CBP efforts to develop a staffing model, train staff, carry out traveler inspections, and develop performance measures.[9] For information that would provide an overall picture of CBP's efforts, we reviewed and analyzed several nationwide databases, including data on staffing, training, attrition, resource requests from CBP's 20 field offices[10] and 1 pre-clearance headquarters office, and apprehension of inadmissible aliens and other violators at major air and land ports of entry. We assessed the reliability of CBP's data from CBP's random selection program of travelers and staffing and training data by, among other things, meeting with knowledgeable officials about these data, reviewing relevant documentation, and performing electronic testing. We concluded that data from CBP databases, with the exception of the data on training as we discuss in our report, were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of our review. Although we discussed the staffing model and its results with CBP officials responsible for the model, validating the model and its results was outside the scope of our review.

To supplement our analyses of CBP's nationwide data, we visited eight ports of entry. While we cannot generalize our work from our visits to all ports of entry, we chose these ports of entry to provide examples of operations at air and land ports of entry. At each site, we held discussion groups with CBP officers and met with management to discuss, among other things, staffing and training programs. In addition, GAO investigators visited other small ports of entry to test the traveler inspection process.

[9] Our work on training focused on the training provided at ports of entry and did not include basic training given to CBP officers at the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center. We also did not examine the role of agricultural specialists in CBP because we issued a report on agricultural inspections at ports of entry last year. See GAO, *Homeland Security: Management and Coordination Problems Increase the Vulnerability of U.S. Agriculture to Foreign Pests and Disease*, GAO-06-644 (Washington D.C.: May 19, 2006).

[10] CBP's 20 field offices are responsible for managing more than 300 ports of entry.

Although we cannot generalize our investigators' work at these locations to all ports of entry, we selected these ports of entry to provide examples of traveler inspections. Our investigators did their work in accordance with quality standards for investigations as set forth by the President's Council on Integrity and Efficiency. Unless we specify that the work was done by our investigators, all referrals to our visits to ports of entry pertain to the eight air and land ports of entry we visited. In addition, we analyzed the 2004 and 2006 Office of Personnel Management Federal Human Capital Surveys of staff at 36 federal agencies, including the results from CBP, that dealt with the views of federal employees on training and staffing in the workplace. We reviewed standards for internal control in the federal government[11] and compared the standards for information and communications and monitoring with CBP's policies and procedures for traveler inspections. Finally, we reviewed prior GAO reports on best practices for developing strategic plans and performance measures and compared the best practices with CBP's plans and measures for its operations at its ports of entry. We did our work in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards from August 2006 through September 2007.

Summary

CBP has had some success in interdicting inadmissible aliens and other violators, but weaknesses in its traveler inspection procedures and related physical infrastructure increase the potential that dangerous people and illegal goods could enter the country. In 2006, CBP officers turned away over 200,000 aliens who attempted to enter the country illegally, and seized over 600,000 pounds of illegal drugs and more than 40,000 fraudulent documents, according to CBP. To help officers identify potential violators, CBP has installed additional technology to inspect vehicles for smuggled aliens and illicit cargo and to check traveler documents against law enforcement databases. While CBP has had some success in apprehending inadmissible aliens and other violators, its analyses indicate that several thousand inadmissible aliens and other violators entered the country at air and land ports of entry in fiscal year 2006.[12] When CBP does not apprehend a potentially dangerous person, this increases the potential that national security may be compromised.

[11] GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1 (Washington, D.C.: November 1999).

[12] We did not include data on the rate at which CBP apprehends inadmissible aliens and other violators who seek to enter the country because the data are considered sensitive.

Weaknesses that contributed to failed inspections relate both to procedures and to infrastructure:

Weaknesses in traveler inspection procedures. In mid-2006, CBP reviewed videotapes from about 150 large and small ports of entry and, according to CBP officials, determined that while CBP officers carried out thorough traveler inspections in many instances, they also identified numerous examples where traveler inspections at land ports of entry were weak in that they did not determine the citizenship and admissibility of travelers entering the country as required by law. The following were examples that were on the videotape:

- In one instance, officers waved vehicles into the United States without stopping the vehicle or interviewing the driver or its passengers as required. In another instance, motorcycles passed through inspection lanes without stopping and making any contact with an officer. In a third instance, during "lane switches" when CBP officers were relieved of their duty and replaced by other officers, officers waved traffic through the lane while the officer logged into the computer. The proper procedure is for traffic to be stopped until the officer is logged into the system and is available to perform proper inspections.

- In another instance, while the CBP officer was reviewing information on his computer screen, he waved pedestrians through the lane without looking at them, making verbal contact, or inspecting travel documents. In another instance, travelers would simply hold up their identification cards and officers would view them without stepping out of the booth before waving the vehicle through. In these cases, the officers did not appear to make verbal contact with the passengers and did not interview any passengers sitting in the back seat of the vehicle. As a final example, officers did not board recreational vehicles to determine whether additional traveler inspections should be carried out.

Without checking the identity, citizenship, and admissibility of travelers, there is an increased potential that dangerous people and inadmissible goods may enter the country and cause harm to American citizens and the economy. According to CBP interviews with apprehended alien smugglers, alien smuggling organizations have been aware of weaknesses in CBP's inspection procedures and they have trained operatives to take advantage of these weaknesses. This awareness heightens the potential that failed inspections will occur at ports of entry when such procedural weaknesses exist.

According to CBP senior management, the factors that may have contributed to these weaknesses included the following:

- Failure to engage, lack of focus, and complacency. According to CBP senior management, emphasis is not being placed on all missions, and there is a failure by some of its officers to recognize the threat associated with dangerous people and goods entering the country.

- Insufficient staffing. According to CBP senior management, they are unable to staff ports of entry to sufficiently accommodate the workload. Lack of sufficient staff contributes to officers working double shifts, sometimes resulting in fatigue that can affect decisions.[13]

- Lack of supervisory presence in primary inspections. CBP senior management noted that lack of supervisory presence at primary inspection booths can contribute to less than optimal inspections.

- Lack of training. CBP senior management acknowledged that, in some cases, periodic and on-the-job training is not being delivered.

In the summer of 2006, CBP management took actions to place greater management emphasis on traveler inspections by holding meetings with senior management to reinforce the importance of carrying out effective inspections and by providing training to all supervisors and officers on the importance of interviewing travelers, checking travel documents, and having adequate supervisory presence. However, tests our investigators conducted in October 2006 and January 2007—as many as 5 months after CBP issued management guidance and conducted the training—showed similar weaknesses as those on the videotape were still occurring in traveler inspections at ports of entry. At two ports, our investigators were not asked to provide a travel document to verify their identity—a procedure that management had called on officers to carry out—as part of the inspection. The extent of continued noncompliance is unknown, but these results point to the challenge CBP management faces in ensuring its directives are carried out. Standards for internal control in the federal government require that information should be communicated to agency management to enable it to carry out its program responsibilities. In July 2007, CBP issued new internal policies and procedures for agency officials responsible for its traveler inspection program at land ports of entry. The

[13] Staffing and training issues are discussed in more detail later in this testimony.

new policies and procedures require field office managers to conduct periodic audits and assessments to ensure compliance with the new inspection procedures. However, they do not call on managers to share the results of their assessments with headquarters management. Without this communication, CBP management may be hindering its ability to efficiently use the information to overcome weaknesses in traveler inspections.

Weaknesses in physical infrastructure. While we cannot generalize our findings, at several land ports of entry of entry that we examined, barriers designed to ensure that vehicles pass through a CBP inspection booth were not in place, increasing the risk that vehicles could enter the country without inspection.[14] CBP recognizes that it has infrastructure weaknesses and has estimated it needs about $4 billion to make the capital improvements needed at all 163 of the nation's land crossings. CBP has prioritized the ports with the greatest need. Each year, depending upon funding availability, CBP submits its proposed capital improvement projects based upon the prioritized list it has developed. Several factors affect CBP's ability to make improvements, including the fact that some ports of entry are owned by other governmental or private entities, potentially adding to the time needed to agree on infrastructure changes and put them in place. For example, according to CBP officials, for 96 ports of entry that are owned by the General Services Administration (GSA), GSA approves and prioritizes capital improvement projects. The process of submitting a request for an infrastructure improvement and completion of the project is approximately 7 years from start to finish, according to a GSA official. For 23 ports of entry that are privately owned and leased by GSA,[15] CBP officials noted that coordinating with privately-owned companies on infrastructure improvements is a difficult process because the private owner's interest in facilitating commerce must be balanced with CBP's interest in national security. As of September 2007, CBP had infrastructure projects related to 20 different ports of entry in various stages of development.

As previously mentioned, insufficient staffing and lack of training can contribute to a greater likelihood of failed traveler inspections. CBP has

[14] The locations and a description of weaknesses in physical infrastructure are considered sensitive information and therefore are not included in this testimony.

[15] Examples of privately-owned ports of entry that are leased to GSA include the Rainbow Bridge in Niagara Falls, New York, and the Windsor Tunnel in Detroit, Michigan.

taken action to improve staffing and training at ports of entry by assessing staffing needs, adding more officers since 2005 in response to higher budgeted staffing levels, and developing an extensive training program, but it lacks (1) data to measure progress on providing required training and (2) certain elements in its on-the-job training program for new CBP officers, which limits its ability to effectively train and evaluate the performance of new officers. According to managers at ports of entry, staffing shortages can result in, among other things, officer fatigue that can affect the quality of traveler inspections. Untrained or poorly trained officers can increase the probability that terrorists, inadmissible aliens, and illicit goods will enter the country. Progress and problems with staffing and training involved the following:

Progress and problems with staffing. Responding to language in a conference report for its fiscal year 2007 appropriation, CBP has developed a staffing model to estimate staffing needs. The model is based on several assumptions, such as whether overtime is considered as part of CBP's staffing at ports of entry. CBP's model estimates that CBP may need up to several thousand more officers and agricultural specialists[16] to operate its ports of entry.[17] According to field officials, lack of staff is affecting their ability to carry out border security responsibilities. For example, we examined requests for resources from CBP's 20 field offices and its preclearance headquarters office for January 2007 and found that managers at 19 of the 21 offices cited examples of anti-terrorism activities not being carried out, new or expanded facilities that were not fully operational, and radiation monitors and other inspection technologies not being fully used because of staff shortages. At seven of the eight major ports we visited, officers and managers told us that not having sufficient staff contributes to morale problems, fatigue, lack of backup support, and safety issues when officers inspect travelers—increasing the potential that terrorists,

[16] The agricultural specialist is a technical, scientific position rather than a law enforcement position with an emphasis on detecting and preventing the importation of harmful agricultural pests and diseases. The agricultural specialist is responsible for conducting agriculture inspections of passengers and cargo as well as analysis of agriculture imports. Additionally, agricultural specialists are not authorized to carry firearms, and therefore, they cannot staff primary inspection lanes. However, they may provide backup support to CBP officers during secondary screening.

[17] CBP has determined that data from the staffing model is law enforcement sensitive. Therefore, we are not providing more detailed data and information from the model in this testimony.

inadmissible travelers, and illicit goods could enter the country. In addition, officers at six of the eight ports of entry we visited indicated that officer fatigue caused by excessive overtime negatively affected inspections at their ports of entry. On occasion, officers said they are called upon to work 16-hour shifts, spending long stints in the primary passenger processing lanes to keep lanes open, in part to minimize traveler wait times.[18] Further evidence of fatigue came from officers who said that CBP officers call in sick due to exhaustion, in part to avoid mandatory overtime, which in turn exacerbates the staffing challenges faced by the ports.

Reported staffing shortages are exacerbated by challenges in retaining staff, contributing to an increasing number of vacant positions nationwide.[19] CBP officials attribute attrition to retirements, officers receiving better law enforcement benefits at other DHS components and other federal agencies, and new officers being unable to afford high cost-of-living locations. Low job satisfaction, as reflected in the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Federal Human Capital Survey, is also a contributing factor to attrition, according to CBP. CBP recognized that it has a problem with retaining staff and plans to develop ways to stem its problems in this area. For example, CBP plans to analyze attrition data and data from OPM's Human Capital Survey and employee satisfaction and exit surveys in order to help identify what actions are needed to curb attrition. CBP plans to develop some initial retention strategies by December 2008 and by September 2009 develop approaches to retain staff based on areas of concern identified in the employee exit survey.

Progress and problems with training. CBP has developed 37 courses on such topics as how to carry out inspections and detect fraudulent documents and has instituted national guidelines for a 12-week on-the-job training program that new officers should receive at land ports of entry. However, CBP faces challenges in providing the required training. Managers at seven of the eight ports of entry we visited said that they were challenged in putting staff through training because staffing shortfalls force the ports to choose between performing port operations and providing training. For example, at one land port of entry we visited,

[18] Specific concerns from CBP officials of how officer fatigue affects primary inspections are not included in this testimony because the information is considered sensitive.

[19] Specific data on CBP's budgeted staffing level and the number of officers onboard are not included in this testimony because CBP considers the data sensitive.

managers stated that courses are scheduled, but then canceled because of staffing concerns.

Managers and supervisors at six of eight ports of entry we visited told us that vulnerabilities in traveler inspections occurred when officers did not receive cross-training before rotating to new inspection areas. Although CBP's training policy calls for no officer to be placed in an area without receiving the proper cross-training module, officers and supervisors at ports of entry we visited told us that officers were placed in situations for which they had not been trained. While we cannot determine the degree to which this is happening in other ports of entry cross the country, we identified several examples where this policy is not being followed at the ports of entry we visited. For example, legacy customs officers at one port of entry reported feeling ill prepared when called upon to inspect passengers because they had not received the requisite training. One supervisor at this port of entry stated that he had "no confidence" that the officers he supervised could process the casework for a marijuana seizure correctly to successfully prosecute the violator because they had not received training. Supervisors at another port of entry told us that they were rotated to areas in which they had not received training. With responsibility over admissibility decisions, these supervisors were concerned that they could not answer questions from their subordinates or make necessary determinations beyond their area of expertise. As a result of not being trained, officers at this port stated that they relied heavily on senior officers from legacy agencies. The officers also told us that these senior officers have been leaving the agency. CBP managers in headquarters recognize that insufficient training can lead to a higher risk of failed inspections. For example, in a presentation that was given to all field office directors, CBP headquarters officials stated that untrained officers increase the risk that terrorists, inadmissible travelers, and illicit goods could enter the country.

Standards for internal control in the federal government provide a framework for agencies to achieve effective and efficient operations and ultimately to improve accountability. One of the standards calls on agencies to compare actual performance to planned or expected results throughout the organization and to analyze significant differences. However, CBP lacks data that show whether the individuals who require training are receiving it. Having reliable data to measure the degree to which training has been delivered would put CBP management in a position to better gauge the results of its cross-training program. In regards to on-the-job training, while CBP guidance states that new officers at land ports of entry should receive 12 weeks of on-the-job training, new

officers at the ports we visited did not receive 12 weeks of training. For example, at one port of entry, new officers told us they received between 2 weeks and 6 weeks of on-the-job training. In addition, internal control standards related to management of human capital state that management should ensure that the organization has a workforce that has the required skills necessary to achieve organizational goals. CBP's guidance for its on-the-job training program does not require that new CBP officers perform certain tasks in order to develop needed skills or that the officers demonstrate proficiency in specific tasks. In contrast, the U.S. Border Patrol, another office within CBP, has developed a field training program where officers are required to demonstrate proficiency in 32 different skills. We discussed the utility of the Border Patrol's on-the-job training standards with CBP officials who told us that they might examine the Border Patrol's program to identify best practices that they could incorporate into the on-the-job training program for new CBP officers. When staff do not receive required training or are not trained consistently with program guidance, it limits knowledge building and increases the risk that needed expertise is not developed.

Our analysis of OPM's 2006 Federal Human Capital Survey shows that CBP staff expressed concern about training. Our analysis shows that less than half of nonsupervisory CBP staff were satisfied with how CBP assesses their training needs (43 percent), the extent to which supervisors support employee development (43 percent), and the degree to which supervisors provide constructive feedback on how to improve (42 percent). In responding to these three questions, a significantly lower percentage of nonsupervisory staff at CBP was satisfied with their training experiences than nonsupervisory staff in other federal agencies.

CBP has developed strategic goals that call for, among other things, establishing ports of entry where threats are deterred and inadmissible people and goods are intercepted—a key goal related to traveler inspections—but it faces challenges in developing a performance measure that tracks progress in achieving this goal. Linking performance to strategic goals and objectives and publicly reporting this information is important so that Congress and the public have better information about agency performance and to help to ensure accountability. While CBP's 2006 Performance and Accountability Report included some performance measures related to CBP's goal of intercepting inadmissible people and goods, the report did not include a performance measure regarding how effective CBP is at achieving this goal at ports of entry. CBP has data on the degree to which it interdicts travelers who seek to enter the country illegally or who violate other laws at major air and land ports of entry.

During the course of our review, we discussed with CBP officials the potential of using these data as one way of measuring the effectiveness of CBP inspection efforts. In June 2007, CBP officials told us that CBP was in the process of selecting performance measures for fiscal year 2008 and a decision had not yet been made on whether to include these data or other similar outcome-based measures in its performance report.

Concluding Remarks

Effective inspection of the millions of travelers entering the country each year is critical to the security of the United States. As CBP matures as an organization, having effective inspection procedures, retaining its officer corps, and developing the necessary skills in its officer corps are essential given the critical role that CBP plays in national security. Although CBP developed new inspection procedures that require CBP field office directors to monitor and assess compliance with the new procedures, a key internal control requiring field office directors to communicate with CBP management the results of their monitoring and assessment efforts is not in place. As a result, CBP management may not get information that would identify weaknesses in the traveler inspections process that need to be addressed. The initial set of actions that CBP has taken for dealing with challenges in training at ports of entry is a positive start, but it has not established a mechanism to know whether officers who need specific cross-training have received it and whether new CBP officers have experience in the necessary job tasks and are proficient in them. This means that some officers may be called on to perform certain inspection tasks without having the knowledge and skills to do them.

It is also important to have performance measures in place to permit agency management to gauge progress in achieving program goals and, if not, to take corrective action. In regard to traveler inspections, CBP is missing an important performance measure that shows what results are achieved in apprehending inadmissible aliens and other violators. CBP has apprehension rate data that could be used to develop such a performance measure. Having performance measures related to the effectiveness of CBP interdiction efforts would help inform Congress and agency management of improvements resulting from changes in CBP's traveler inspection program and what gaps in coverage, if any, remain.

In our report,[20] we made a number of recommendations to mitigate the risk of failed traveler inspections. We recommended that the Secretary of

[20] See GAO–08–219.

Homeland Security direct the Commissioner of Customs and Border Protection to take the following four actions:

- implement internal controls to help ensure that field office directors communicate to agency management the results of their monitoring and assessment efforts so that agencywide results can be analyzed and necessary actions taken to ensure that new traveler inspection procedures are carried out in a consistent way across all ports of entry;
- develop data on cross-training programs that measure whether the individuals who require training are receiving it so that agency management is in a better position to measure progress toward achieving training goals;
- incorporate into CBP's procedures for its on-the-job training program (1) specific tasks that CBP officers must experience during on-the-job training and (2) requirements for measuring officer proficiency in performing those tasks; and
- formalize a performance measure for the traveler inspection program that identifies CBP's effectiveness in apprehending inadmissible aliens and other violators.

DHS said it agreed with our recommendations and discussed actions CBP has underway or has taken to address our recommendations.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared statement. I would be happy to answer any questions that you and the Members of the committee may have.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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