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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-06-982, a report to congressional requesters

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY

DHS Should Address Key Challenges before Implementing the Transportation Worker Identification Credential Program

Why GAO Did This Study

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is developing the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) to ensure that only workers that do not pose a terrorist threat are allowed to enter secure areas of transportation facilities. TSA completed TWIC program testing in June 2005 and is moving forward with implementing the program in the maritime sector by the end of this year. To evaluate the status of the TWIC program, GAO examined (1) what problems, if any, were identified during TWIC program testing and what key challenges, if any, do the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and industry stakeholders face in implementing the program; and (2) to what extent, if at all, did TSA experience problems in planning for and overseeing the contract to test the TWIC program. To address these issues, GAO interviewed DHS officials and industry stakeholders, reviewed documentation regarding TWIC testing, and conducted site visits to testing locations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that, before implementing TWIC in the maritime sector, TSA develop and test solutions to problems identified during testing to ensure that key components of the program work effectively and strengthen contract planning and oversight practices before awarding the TWIC implementation contract. DHS reviewed a draft of this report and concurred with GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-982.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cathleen Berrick at (202) 512-3404 or berrickc@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

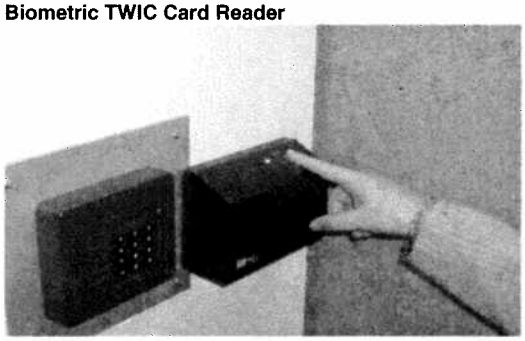
DHS and industry stakeholders face three major challenges in addressing problems identified during TWIC program testing and ensuring that key components of the TWIC program can work effectively in the maritime sector.

- Enrolling workers and issuing TWIC cards in a timely manner to a significantly larger population of workers than was done during testing of the TWIC program.
- Ensuring that the TWIC technology, such as biometric card readers, works effectively in the maritime sector. TSA has obtained limited information on the use of biometric readers in the maritime sector because most facilities that tested the TWIC program did not use these types of readers.
- Balancing the added security components of the TWIC program with the potential impact that the program could have on the flow of maritime commerce.

An independent contractor's assessment found deficiencies with TWIC program testing and recommended that additional testing be conducted to determine its effectiveness. TSA has acknowledged that there are challenges to implementing the TWIC program and has taken some actions to address these issues, including allowing more time to consider requirements for installing TWIC access control technologies. However, TSA plans no additional testing of the TWIC program. Rapidly moving forward with implementation of the TWIC program without developing and testing solutions to identified problems to ensure that they work effectively could lead to further problems, increased costs, and program delays without achieving the program's intended goals.

TSA experienced problems in planning for and overseeing the contract to test the TWIC program. Specifically, TSA made a number of changes to contract requirements after the contract was awarded, contributing to a doubling of contract costs, and TSA did not ensure that all key components of the program were tested. TSA has acknowledged that problems with contractor oversight occurred because the agency did not have sufficient personnel to monitor contractor performance. TSA has taken some actions to address this problem. However, until TSA issues the contract for TWIC implementation and develops its plans for monitoring contractor performance, it is not clear to what extent these actions will ensure that the contract to implement the TWIC program will include comprehensive and clearly defined requirements and that contractor performance will be closely monitored to ensure that the program is implemented successfully and costs are controlled.

Biometric TWIC Card Reader



Source: GAO.