



Testimony

Before the Committee on Homeland  
Security and Government Affairs,  
U.S. Senate

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**EXPLOSIVES  
DETECTION CANINES**

**TSA Has Enhanced Its  
Canine Program, but  
Opportunities May Exist to  
Reduce Costs**

Statement of Jennifer Grover, Director  
Homeland Security and Justice

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-444T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

TSA has implemented a multilayered system composed of people, processes, and technology to protect the nation's transportation systems. One of TSA's security layers is comprised of nearly 800 deployed explosives detection canine teams—a canine paired with a handler. These teams include PSC teams trained to detect explosives on passengers and conventional canines trained to detect explosives in objects, such as cargo.

In January 2013, GAO issued a report on TSA's explosives detection canine program. This testimony addresses the steps TSA has taken since 2013 to enhance its canine program and further opportunities to assess the program.

This statement is based on GAO's January 2013 report, a June 2014 testimony, and selected updates conducted in February 2016 on canine training and operations. The products cited in this statement provide detailed information on GAO's scope and methodology. For the selected updates, GAO reviewed the president's fiscal year 2017 budget request for TSA and interviewed TSA officials on changes made to NEDCTP since June 2014, the last time GAO reported on the program.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making no new recommendations in this statement.

View [GAO-16-444T](#). For more information, contact Jennifer Grover, (202) 512-7141, [groverj@gao.gov](mailto:groverj@gao.gov).

March 3, 2016

## EXPLOSIVES DETECTION CANINES

### TSA Has Enhanced Its Canine Program, but Opportunities May Exist to Reduce Costs

#### What GAO Found

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has taken steps to enhance its National Explosives Detection Canine Team Program (NEDCTP) since GAO's 2013 report, but further opportunities exist for TSA to assess its canine program and potentially reduce costs.

**TSA Uses Data to Assess Canine Team Proficiency and Utilization:** In January 2013, GAO reported that TSA needed to take actions to analyze NEDCTP data and ensure canine teams are effectively utilized. GAO recommended that TSA regularly analyze available data to identify program trends and areas that are working well and those in need of corrective action to guide program resources and activities. TSA concurred, and in June 2014, GAO reported that the agency had taken actions that address the recommendation. GAO subsequently closed the recommendation as implemented in August 2014. Since then, according to TSA officials, the agency has continued to enhance its canine program. For example, TSA reported that it requires canine teams to train on all explosives training aids they must be able to detect—any explosive used to test and train a canine—in all search areas (e.g., aircraft), every 45 days.

**TSA has Deployed PSC Teams to the Highest-Risk Airports:** GAO found in January 2013 that passenger screening canine (PSC) teams were not being deployed to the highest-risk airports as called for in TSA's 2012 Strategic Framework or utilized for passenger screening. GAO recommended that TSA coordinate with airport stakeholders to deploy future PSC teams to the highest-risk airports and ensure that deployed teams were utilized as intended. TSA concurred, and in June 2014, GAO reported that PSC teams had been deployed or allocated to the highest-risk airports. In January 2015, GAO closed the recommendation as implemented after TSA deployed all remaining PSC teams to the highest-risk airports and all teams were being utilized for passenger screening.

**Opportunities May Exist for TSA to Reduce Canine Program Costs:** GAO reported in 2013 that TSA began deploying PSC teams prior to determining their operational effectiveness and identifying where within the airport these teams would be most effectively utilized. GAO recommended that TSA take actions to comprehensively assess the effectiveness of PSCs. TSA concurred and has taken steps to determine the effectiveness of PSC teams and where in the airport to optimally deploy such teams. However, TSA did not compare the effectiveness of PSCs and conventional canines in detecting explosives odor on passengers to determine if the greater cost of training PSCs is warranted. In December 2014, TSA reported that it did not intend to do this assessment because of the liability of using conventional canines to screen persons when they had not been trained to do so. GAO closed the recommendation as not implemented, stating that conventional canines currently work in close proximity with people as they patrol airport terminals, including ticket counters and curbside areas. GAO continues to believe that opportunities may exist for TSA to reduce costs if conventional canines are found to be as effective at detecting explosives odor on passengers as PSCs.

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Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Carper, and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to discuss our work on the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) National Explosives Detection Canine Team Program (NEDCTP). TSA, an agency within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), is the primary federal agency responsible for the security of the nation's transportation systems. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, TSA has implemented a multilayered system of security composed of people, processes, and technology to protect transportation systems. One of TSA's security layers is comprised of nearly 800 deployed explosives detection canine teams—a canine paired with a handler—aimed at deterring and detecting the use of explosive devices in U.S. transportation systems.<sup>1</sup>

Through NEDCTP, TSA trains, deploys, and certifies explosives detection canine teams. The program began under the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) in 1972 as a partnership with state and local law enforcement agencies with jurisdiction over airports by pairing state and local law enforcement officer (LEO) handlers with conventional canines—canines trained to detect explosives in objects (e.g., baggage and vehicles). In accordance with the Aviation and Transportation Security Act, enacted in November 2001, TSA assumed from FAA primary responsibility for civil aviation security and, as a result, the transfer of FAA's canine program to TSA was accomplished in March 2003.<sup>2</sup> TSA subsequently expanded the program beyond airports to other transportation modes, including mass transit and maritime. In January 2008, TSA further expanded the program to include transportation security inspector (TSI) canine teams responsible for screening air cargo.<sup>3</sup> In 2011, TSA again expanded the program by deploying TSI handlers to airports with passenger screening canines (PSC)—

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<sup>1</sup>NEDCTP is located within TSA's Office of Security Operations.

<sup>2</sup>Specifically, the Aviation and Transportation Security Act established, within the Department of Transportation, TSA as the agency responsible for securing the nation's transportation systems. See Pub. L. No. 107-71, § 101(a), 115 Stat. 597 (2001). TSA subsequently transferred to the newly established DHS pursuant to the Homeland Security Act of 2002. See Pub. L. No. 107-296, § 403, 116 Stat. 2135, 2178 (2002).

<sup>3</sup>Unlike LEOs, TSIs are unarmed TSA personnel with no authority to take law enforcement action (e.g., arrest or detain).

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conventional canines also trained to detect explosives being carried or worn on a person. Furthermore, in 2015, TSA began training and certifying all TSI air cargo teams as PSC teams.<sup>4</sup> By the end of calendar year 2016, TSA expects that all air cargo teams will be PSC certified, providing the agency greater flexibility in how it can utilize its canine teams.

My testimony today addresses the steps TSA has taken since 2013 to enhance its canine program and further opportunities to assess the program. This statement is based on our January 2013 report, June 2014 testimony, and includes selected updates on canine training and operations.<sup>5</sup> The products cited in this statement provide detailed information on our scope and methodology. To conduct our selected updates, we reviewed the president's fiscal year 2017 budget request for TSA and interviewed agency officials in February 2016 on changes made to NEDCTP since June 2014. The work upon which this statement is based was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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## Background

NEDCTP's mission is to deter and detect the introduction of explosive devices into U.S. transportation systems. As of February 2016, NEDCTP has deployed 787 of the 997 canine teams for which it has funding available in fiscal year 2016 across transportation systems.<sup>6</sup> There are four types of LEO canine teams: aviation, mass transit, maritime, and

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<sup>4</sup>TSA plans on dual certifying all TSI-led teams as PSC teams, but is not dual certifying LEO-led conventional canine teams.

<sup>5</sup>GAO, *Explosives Detection Canines: TSA Has Taken Steps to Analyze Canine Team Data and Assess the Effectiveness of Passenger Screening Canines*, [GAO-14-695T](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 24, 2014); and *TSA Explosives Detection Canine Program: Actions Needed to Analyze Data and Ensure Canine Teams Are Effectively Utilized*, [GAO-13-239](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2013). [GAO-13-239](#) is a public version of a sensitive report that we issued in December 2012 under the same title. Information TSA deemed Sensitive Security Information was redacted.

<sup>6</sup>As of February 2016, an additional 149 teams are "in transition" meaning that they are in training, awaiting an operational assessment, or canine replacement, among other things.

multimodal; and two types of TSI canine teams: multimodal and PSC. Table 1 shows the number of canine teams by type for which funding is available, describes their roles and responsibilities, and costs per team to TSA.

**Table 1: Total Number, Roles and Responsibilities, and Federal Costs of Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Canine Teams by Type of Team**

Type of canine team	Number of teams for which funding is available <sup>a</sup>	Description of roles and responsibilities	TSA start-up costs per team <sup>b</sup>	TSA annual costs per team <sup>b</sup>
Law enforcement officer (LEO): aviation	503	Patrol airport terminals, including ticket counters, curbside areas, and secured areas; respond to calls to search unattended items, such as vehicles and baggage; screen air cargo; and serve as general deterrents to would-be terrorists or criminals	\$85,000	\$54,000
LEO: mass transit	127	Patrol mass transit terminals; search platforms, railcars, and buses; respond to calls to search unattended items, such as baggage; and serve as general deterrents to would-be terrorists or criminals	\$85,000	\$54,000
LEO: maritime	11	Conduct similar activities as LEO mass transit teams at ferry terminals	\$85,000	\$54,000
LEO: multimodal	34	Patrol and search transportation modes in their geographic area (e.g., aviation, mass transit, and maritime), and screen air cargo	\$85,000	\$54,000
Transportation security inspector (TSI): multimodal <sup>c</sup>	46	Patrol and search transportation modes in their geographic area (e.g., aviation, mass transit, or maritime), and screen air cargo	\$218,000	\$153,000
TSI: Passenger screening canine (PSC) <sup>c</sup>	276	Primarily search for explosives odor on passengers in airport terminals	\$223,000	\$154,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>997</b>			

Source: GAO analysis of TSA data. | GAO-16-444T

<sup>a</sup>The number of teams for which funding is available in fiscal year 2016.

<sup>b</sup>The cost data are as of July 2015, and have been rounded to the nearest thousand. Start-up costs reflect the costs incurred by TSA during the first year the canine team is deployed. Annual costs include the operations and maintenance costs incurred by TSA to keep canine teams deployed after their first year in the program.

<sup>c</sup>While the types of TSI-led teams are categorized as either multimodal or passenger screening canine, according to TSA, the agency's long-term intent is to have all 322 TSI teams categorized as multimodal once trained in passenger screening so they can operate across modes to meet mission needs. TSI-led teams previously categorized as air cargo teams have been included above as passenger screening teams since TSA is in the process of certifying those teams as PSC teams.

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TSA's start-up costs for LEO teams include the costs of training the canine and handler, and providing the handler's agency a stipend.<sup>7</sup> The annual costs to TSA for LEO teams reflect the amount of the stipend. TSA's start-up and annual costs for TSI canine teams are greater than those for LEO teams, because TSI handlers are TSA employees and therefore the costs include the handlers' pay and benefits, service vehicles, and cell phones, among other things. PSC teams come at an increased cost to TSA compared with other TSI teams because of the additional 2 weeks of training and costs associated with providing decoys (i.e., persons pretending to be passengers who walk around the airport with explosive training aids). In fiscal year 2016, approximately \$121.7 million of amounts appropriated to TSA were available for its canine program. For fiscal year 2017, TSA is requesting approximately \$131.4 million, a \$9.7 million increase compared to the prior fiscal year. According to a TSA official, the increase is for projected pay increases and 16 additional positions to support canine training and operations, among other things.

Figure 1 shows LEO, TSI, and PSC teams performing searches in different environments.

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<sup>7</sup>The annual stipend is the federal cost share TSA provides per LEO team pursuant to a cooperative agreement between TSA and the LEO team's agency (state or local). Certain items and services are reimbursable by TSA through the stipend, including canine food and veterinary care. The LEO team's agency is responsible for any costs incurred greater than the amount covered by the stipend.

**Figure 1: Various Types of Canine Teams**



Law enforcement officer team patrolling mass transit terminal



Transportation security inspector team screening air cargo



Passenger screening canine team searching airport terminal

Source: GAO. | GAO-16-444T

Conventional canines undergo 15 weeks of explosives detection training, and PSCs 25 weeks, before being paired with a handler at TSA's Canine Training Center (CTC), located at Lackland Air Force Base. Conventional canine handlers attend a 10-week training course, and PSC handlers attend a 12-week training course.<sup>8</sup> The 2 additional weeks are used to train PSC teams in actual work environments.<sup>9</sup> Canines are paired with a LEO or TSI handler during their training course. After canine teams complete this training, and obtain initial certification, they acclimate to their home operating environment for a 30-day period. Upon completion of the acclimation period, CTC conducts a 3-day operational transitional assessment to ensure canine teams are not experiencing any performance challenges in their home operating environment.

<sup>8</sup>The majority of canine teams are trained by TSA's CTC. However, according to TSA officials, because of resource constraints, TSA contracted with Strijder Group K9, which subcontracted to Auburn University's Canine Detection Training Center to train some of the initial PSC teams deployed in 2011 and 2012.

<sup>9</sup>As previously mentioned, TSA is certifying air cargo teams as PSC teams. To facilitate this transition, CTC developed and rolled out a 4-week PSC training course (referred to as the bridge course) for handlers who were already trained and certified with conventional canines.

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After initial certification, canine teams are evaluated on an annual basis to maintain certification. During conventional explosives detection evaluations, canine teams must demonstrate their ability to detect all the explosive training aids the canines were trained to detect in five search areas (e.g., aircraft).<sup>10</sup> The five search areas are randomly selected among all the possible types of search areas, but according to CTC, include the area that is most relevant to the type of canine team. For example, teams assigned to airports will be evaluated in areas such as aircraft and cargo. Canine teams must find a certain percentage of the explosive training aids to pass their annual conventional evaluation. In addition, a specified number of nonproductive responses—when a canine responds to a location where no explosives odor is present—are allowed. After passing the conventional evaluation, PSC teams are required to undergo an additional annual evaluation that includes detecting explosives on a person, or being carried by a person. PSC teams are tested in different locations within the sterile areas and passenger screening checkpoints of an airport.<sup>11</sup> A certain number of persons with explosive training aids must be detected, and a specified number of nonproductive responses are allowed for PSC certification.

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<sup>10</sup>An explosive training aid is any explosive used to test and train a canine in explosives detection.

<sup>11</sup>The sterile area of an airport is the portion in an airport, defined in the airport's security program, that provides passengers access to boarding aircraft and to which the access generally is controlled by TSA through the screening of persons and property. See 49 C.F.R. § 1540.5. The passenger screening checkpoint is the location within an airport at which passenger access to the sterile area and boarding aircraft is controlled through the screening of persons and their accessible property.



## TSA Has Taken Steps Since 2013 to Enhance Its Canine Program, but Further Opportunities May Exist to Assess the Program and Reduce Costs

TSA has taken steps to enhance NEDCTP since we issued our 2013 report.<sup>12</sup> For example, TSA has used data, such as the results of covert tests, to assess the proficiency and utilization of its canine teams. However, further opportunities exist for TSA to assess its program related to the use and cost of PSC teams.

### TSA Uses Data to Assess Canine Team Proficiency and Utilization

In January 2013, we reported that TSA collected and used key canine program data in its Canine Website System (CWS), a central management database, but it could better analyze these data to identify program trends. For example, we found that TSA did not analyze training minute data over time (from month to month) and therefore was unable to determine trends related to canine teams' compliance with the requirement to train 240 minutes each month. Similarly, TSA collected monthly data on the amount of cargo TSI teams screened in accordance with the agency's requirement, but had not analyzed these data over time to determine if, for example, changes were needed in the screening requirement or the number of teams deployed. Table 2 highlights some of the key data elements included in CWS at the time of our prior review.

**Table 2: Key Data Elements Recorded in the Canine Website System (CWS)**

Data element	Description
Training minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Canine handlers record time spent conducting training to ensure canine teams maintain proficiency in detecting explosives odor.</li> <li>The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) requires canine teams to conduct a minimum of 240 proficiency training minutes every 4 weeks (month) and for handlers to record training minutes in CWS within 48 hours.</li> </ul>
Utilization minutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Law Enforcement Officer teams record time spent patrolling transportation terminals, searching for explosives odor in railcars and buses, for example, and screening air cargo.</li> <li>Transportation Security Inspector teams record time spent screening cargo, which is their primary responsibility.</li> <li>TSA requires canine handlers to record utilization minutes in the CWS within 48 hours.</li> </ul>

<sup>12</sup>[GAO-13-239](#).

Data element	Description
Certification rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Canine Training Center evaluators record the results (certified<sup>a</sup> or decertified<sup>b</sup>) of annual canine team evaluations.</li> </ul>
Short notice assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Field Canine Coordinators administer short notice assessments—covert tests to assess canine teams’ level of operational effectiveness—on two canine teams within each participating agency they oversee each year.</li> <li>Field Canine Coordinators are required to document results of short notice assessments, and handlers are required to record results, in CWS.</li> </ul>
Final canine responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Canine handlers record final canine responses—instances when a canine sits, indicating to its handler that it detects explosives odor.</li> <li>Canine handlers are instructed to document final canine responses into CWS and submit swab samples to TSA’s Canine Explosives Unit to be analyzed for explosives odor.</li> </ul>

Source: GAO analysis of TSA documentation. | GAO-16-444T

<sup>a</sup>Certified teams are canine teams that passed their annual evaluation and are certified to search for explosives.

<sup>b</sup>Decertified teams are canine teams that failed their annual evaluation and are limited to training and providing mobile deterrence.

In January 2013, we recommended that TSA regularly analyze available data to identify program trends and areas that are working well and those in need of corrective action to guide program resources and activities. These analyses could include, but not be limited to, analyzing and documenting trends in proficiency training minutes, canine utilization, results of short notice assessments (covert tests) and final canine responses, performance differences between LEO and TSI canine teams, as well as an assessment of the optimum location and number of canine teams that should be deployed to secure the U.S. transportation system. TSA concurred with our recommendation, and in June 2014 we reported on some of the steps it had taken to implement the recommendation. Specifically, TSA monitored canine teams training minutes over time by producing annual reports. For example, TSA analyzed canine teams’ compliance with the training requirement throughout fiscal year 2013 to identify teams repeatedly not in compliance with the monthly requirement. Field Canine Coordinators subsequently completed comprehensive assessment reviews for their canine teams, which involved reporting on the teams that did not meet the requirement. TSA also reinstated short notice assessments in July 2013, since they had suspended them in May 2012. We reported that in the event a team fails a short notice assessment, the Field Canine Coordinator completes a report that includes an analysis of the team’s training records to identify an explanation for the failure. According to TSA officials, in March 2014, NEDCTP stood up a new office, known as the Performance Measurement Section, to perform analyses of canine team data. Those actions, among others, addressed the intent of our recommendation by positioning TSA to identify program trends to better target resources and activities based on

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what is working well and what may need corrective action. Therefore, we closed the recommendation as implemented in August 2014.

Since we closed the recommendation, according to TSA officials, the agency has continued to take steps to enhance its canine program. For example, TSA eliminated the monthly 240-minute training requirement and instead requires canine teams to train on all explosives training aids they must be able to detect, in all search areas (e.g., aircraft), every 45 days.<sup>13</sup> In April 2015, TSA also eliminated canine teams' requirement to screen a certain volume of air cargo. Instead, TSA requires TSI-led canine teams to spend at least 40 percent of their time on utilization activities, such as patrolling airport terminals and screening air cargo. Canine teams can spend the rest of the time on administrative activities, such as taking their canine to the veterinarian. Handlers record their daily activities in a web-based system, which allow TSA to assess how the canine teams are being used. According to TSA, utilization time increased five percent in fiscal year 2015 since the requirement changed. In February 2016, TSA officials told us that starting in fiscal year 2016, TSA increased the number of short notice assessments required from two to five per year for each state and local law enforcement agency that participates in NEDCTP. According to a TSA official, the number was increased since TSA believes such assessments are helpful in determining the proficiency of canine teams. Furthermore, CTC placed 34 Regional Canine Training Instructors in the field to review canine teams' training records and assist them in resolving any performance challenges, such as challenges in detecting a particular explosive aid.

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## TSA has Deployed PSC Teams to the Highest-Risk Airports

We also reported in January 2013 that TSA's 2012 Strategic Framework called for the deployment of PSC teams based on risk; however, airport stakeholder concerns about the appropriateness of TSA's protocols for resolving PSC team responses resulted in these teams not being deployed to the highest-risk airports or utilized for passenger screening.<sup>14</sup> We recommended that TSA coordinate with airport stakeholders to deploy future PSC teams to the highest-risk airports, and ensure that

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<sup>13</sup>The new requirement applies to TSI-led canine teams, but TSA officials told us it will apply to LEO-led teams as well starting in October 2016.

<sup>14</sup>For the purpose of allocating PSC teams to airports, TSA developed a model to rank airports from highest to lowest risk.

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deployed PSC teams are utilized as intended, consistent with the agency's statutory authority to provide for the screening of passengers and their property. TSA concurred with our recommendation, and in June 2014, we reported that the PSC teams for which TSA had funding and not already deployed to a specific airport at the time our 2013 report had been deployed to or allocated to the highest-risk airports. We also reported that, according to TSA officials, of all the airports where PSC teams had been deployed, all but one airport had agreed to allow TSA to conduct screening of individuals using PSC teams at passenger screening checkpoint queues.

According to TSA, the agency was successful in deploying PSC teams to airports where they were previously declined by aviation stakeholders for various reasons. For example, TSA officials explained that stakeholders have realized that PSCs are an effective means for detecting explosives odor, and no checkpoints have closed because of a nonproductive response. In January 2015, we closed the recommendation as implemented after TSA deployed all remaining PSC teams (those which had previously been allocated) to the highest-risk airports and all PSC teams were being utilized for passenger screening. Since we closed the recommendation, TSA has continued to allocate and deploy additional PSC teams for which it has received funding to the highest-risk airports based on its assessment of how high the risks are to particular airports. In addition, from November 2015 to January 2016, TSA relocated PSC teams located at 7 lower-risk airports to higher-risk airports. As a result, TSA has PSC teams deployed at nearly all category X airports, which are generally higher-risk airports.<sup>15</sup> According to TSA officials, all category X airports will have PSC teams by the end of calendar year 2016.

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<sup>15</sup>TSA classifies TSA-regulated (i.e., commercial) airports in the United States into one of five security risk categories (X, I, II, III, and IV) based on various factors, such as the total number of takeoffs and landings annually, and other special security considerations. In general, category X airports have the largest number of passenger boardings, and category IV airports have the smallest.

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## Further Opportunities May Exist for TSA to Assess Its Canine Program and Reduce Costs

In our January 2013 report, we found that TSA began deploying PSC teams in April 2011 prior to determining the teams' operational effectiveness, and had not completed an assessment to determine where within the airport PSC teams would be most effectively utilized. In June 2012, the DHS Science and Technology Directorate (S&T)<sup>16</sup> and TSA began conducting effectiveness assessments to help demonstrate the effectiveness of PSC teams, but the assessment was not inclusive of all areas of the airport (i.e., the sterile area, passenger screening checkpoint, and public side of the airport).<sup>17</sup> During the June 2012 assessment of PSC teams' effectiveness, TSA conducted one of the search exercises used for the assessment with three conventional canine teams. Although this assessment was not intended to be included as part of DHS S&T and TSA's formal assessment of PSC effectiveness, the results of this assessment suggested, and TSA officials and DHS S&T's Canine Explosives Detection Project Manager agreed, that a systematic assessment with both PSCs and conventional canines could provide TSA with information to determine whether PSCs provide an enhanced security benefit compared with conventional LEO aviation canine teams that have already been deployed to airport terminals.

As a result, we recommended that TSA expand and complete testing, in conjunction with DHS S&T, to assess the effectiveness of PSCs and conventional canines in all airport areas deemed appropriate prior to making additional PSC deployments to help (1) determine whether PSCs are effective at screening passengers, and resource expenditures for PSC training are warranted, and (2) inform decisions regarding the type of canine team to deploy and where to optimally deploy such teams within airports. TSA concurred, and we testified in June 2014 that through its PSC Focused Training and Assessment Initiative—a two-cycle assessment to establish airport-specific optimal working areas, assess team performance, and train teams on best practices—TSA had determined that PSC teams are effective and should be deployed at the passenger checkpoint queue. Furthermore, in February 2014, TSA launched a third PSC assessment cycle to increase the amount of time

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<sup>16</sup>S&T is the primary research and development arm of DHS and manages science and technology research for the department's components, such as TSA.

<sup>17</sup>In general, the public side of an airport includes all areas accessible to people prior to entering a passenger screening checkpoint or after exiting the sterile area of an airport and typically includes the ticketing and baggage claim areas.

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canines can work and enhance their ability to detect explosives placed in areas more challenging to detect. Since our June 2014 testimony, TSA has continued to carry out the third assessment cycle. According to TSA officials, as of February 2016, 68 PSC teams have undergone the assessment. Additionally, TSA officials told us they began a fourth assessment cycle in January 2016 to test PSC teams and all other canine teams on threats identified through intelligence.

Although TSA has taken steps to determine whether PSC teams are effective and where in the airport environment to optimally deploy such teams, TSA has not compared the effectiveness of PSCs and conventional canines in order to determine if the greater cost of training canines in the passenger screening method is warranted. In June 2014, we reported that TSA did not plan to include conventional canine teams in PSC assessments because conventional canines have not been through the process used with PSCs to assess their temperament and behavior when working in proximity to people. We acknowledged TSA's position that half of deployed conventional canines are of a breed not accepted for use in the PSC program, but noted that other conventional canines are suitable breeds, and have been paired with LEO aviation handlers working in proximity with people since they patrol airport terminals, including ticket counters and curbside areas.

In December 2014, TSA reported that it did not intend to include conventional canine teams in PSC assessments and cited concerns about the liability of operating conventional canines in an unfamiliar passenger screening environment. In January 2015, we closed the recommendation as not implemented, reiterating that conventional canines paired with LEO handlers work in close proximity with people since, like PSCs, they also patrol airport terminals. Consistent with our recommendation, we continue to believe that opportunities exist for TSA to conduct an assessment to determine whether conventional canines are as effective at detecting explosives odor on passengers when compared to PSC teams working in specific areas, such as the passenger checkpoint queue. If such an assessment were to indicate that conventional canines are equally as effective at detecting explosives odor on passengers as PSCs, then limiting proficiency training requirements of PSCs to those that currently apply to conventional canine teams could save TSA costs associated with maintaining PSC teams.

Also, as we reported in January 2013, TSA was considering providing some PSCs to LEOs to work on the public side of the airport. Should TSA determine that the additional investment for PSCs is warranted, it could

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reduce the agency's program costs if it deployed PSCs with LEO handlers rather than TSI handlers. Specifically, TSA could save approximately \$100,000 per team each year, as a PSC team led by a LEO handler would cost TSA about \$54,000 annually (the amount of the stipend), compared with about \$154,000, the annual cost per TSI-led PSC team (see table 1).

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Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Carper, and Members of the committee, this completes my prepared statement. I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have at this time.

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## GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

For questions about this statement, please contact Jennifer Grover at (202) 512-7141 or [groverj@gao.gov](mailto:groverj@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this statement. Individuals making key contributions to this statement include Chris Ferencik (Assistant Director), Chuck Bausell, Lisa Canini, Michele Fejfar, Eric Hauswirth, Susan Hsu, Richard Hung, Brendan Kretzschmar, Thomas Lombardi, and Ben Nelson. Key contributors for the previous work that this testimony is based on are listed in those products.

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