Office of Inspector General

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(U) Vulnerabilities Exist in TSA's Checked Baggage Screening Operations

Unclassified Summary

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is responsible for protecting the Nation's transportation systems to ensure freedom of movement for people and commerce. As part of its mission, TSA screens checked baggage to deter, detect, and prevent the carriage of any prohibited items, such as explosives and incendiaries, onboard passenger commercial aircraft. TSA primarily relies on its screening workforce and two types of equipment to screen checked baggage - explosives detection systems and explosives trace detection.

Through covert testing conducted at domestic airports, we determined whether Transportation Security Officers were following established policies and procedures to prevent threat items from being placed onto commercial aircraft. We also determined the operational effectiveness of TSA's checked baggage screening technology. We identified vulnerabilities in this area caused by human and technology-based failures. We also determined that TSA does not have a process in place to assess or identify the cause for equipment-based test failures or the capability to independently assess whether deployed explosive detection systems are operating at the correct detection standards. The compilation of the number of tests conducted, the names of airports tested, and test results are classified, or designated as Sensitive Security Information. According to TSA, the component spent $540 million for checked baggage screening equipment and $11 million for training since 2009. Despite that investment, TSA has not improved checked baggage screening since our last report in 2009.

We made five recommendations that, when implemented, should increase the effectiveness of the checked baggage screening process. TSA concurred with our recommendations.