

**Recommendation:** To better assess the threat of terrorists' misuse of general aviation aircraft and to improve the quality of communicating terrorist threat information to the general aviation community, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security should direct the Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security for the Transportation Security Administration to develop an implementation plan for executing a risk management approach that will help identify threats and vulnerabilities. Such a plan should include milestones, specific time frames, and estimates of funding and staffing needed to focus its resources and efforts on identified airports.

**Agency Affected:** Department of Homeland Security: Directorate of Border and Transportation Security: Transportation Security Administration

**Status:** Closed - implemented

**Comments:** Based on interviews conducted for our review of TSA's Risk-based Transportation Security Plans, TSA officials responsible for general aviation said that the division has put together guidelines to serve as best practices for general aviation. The guidelines include an Airport Characteristic Tool that has elements of a vulnerability assessment. It also includes a list of security guidance to strengthen vulnerabilities. According to our March 2009 report (Transportation Security: Comprehensive Risk Assessments and Stronger Internal Controls Needed to Help Inform TSA Resource Allocation, GAO-09-492), TSA is planning to conduct assessments required by the 9/11 Commission Act on railroad transportation, school buses, rail tank cars, and general aviation airports. Further, we reported that agency officials stated they were reviewing a draft of an aviation risk assessment, known as the Air Domain Risk Assessment (ADRA), which is to provide a scenario-based risk assessment for the aviation system that may augment the information TSA uses to prioritize investments in security measures. In addition, the DHS Office of Inspector General reported on the status of DHS's efforts to secure general aviation in May 2009 (TSA's Role in General Aviation Security, OIG-09-69) and concluded that TSA has (1) identified practical, targeted measures to lessen risks in the aviation sector, based on threat assessments conducted by TSA's Office of Intelligence and other federal intelligence agencies, as well as the heightened awareness of aviation vulnerabilities since September 11, 2001; and (2) worked cooperatively with the industry to establish guidelines and voluntary measures designed to target the most serious vulnerabilities, including screening pilots and restricting access to airspace over urban areas and key infrastructure. While these efforts do not explicitly address our recommendation that TSA develop an implementation plan for executing a risk management approach that will help identify general aviation threats and vulnerabilities, the plans cited in our report and the actions cited by the DHS OIG reflect TSA's intent and ongoing focus on elements of risk management that are essential for enhancing general aviation security.