

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-104489](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

GAO and some agencies' Offices of Inspector General have previously identified concerns with the management of federal working dog programs. These concerns include past mistreatment of working dogs that the U.S. government provided to foreign governments for antiterrorism assistance.

Senate Report 116-236 contains a provision for GAO to review the use of working dogs across the federal government. This report examines (1) the number of working dogs used by federal agencies, and their roles; (2) the extent to which federal agencies' policies and contract-related documents address the health and welfare of working dogs they use; and (3) the number of working dogs the U.S. government provides to foreign partners, and the standards to protect the health and welfare of these dogs.

GAO identified 18 issues important to the health and welfare of working dogs, analyzed working dog program documents to determine whether they addressed these issues, and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 19 recommendations to agencies to ensure that their policies and future contracts address, as appropriate, all 18 health and welfare issues. Of the 16 agencies that reviewed this report, 11 concurred with the recommendations; four did not comment on them. The Department of Energy partially concurred with its two recommendations, indicating that it would evaluate the applicability of the issues. GAO continues to believe that addressing all 18 issues is important.

View [GAO-23-104489](#). For more information, contact Steve Morris at (202) 512-3841 or MorrisS@gao.gov.

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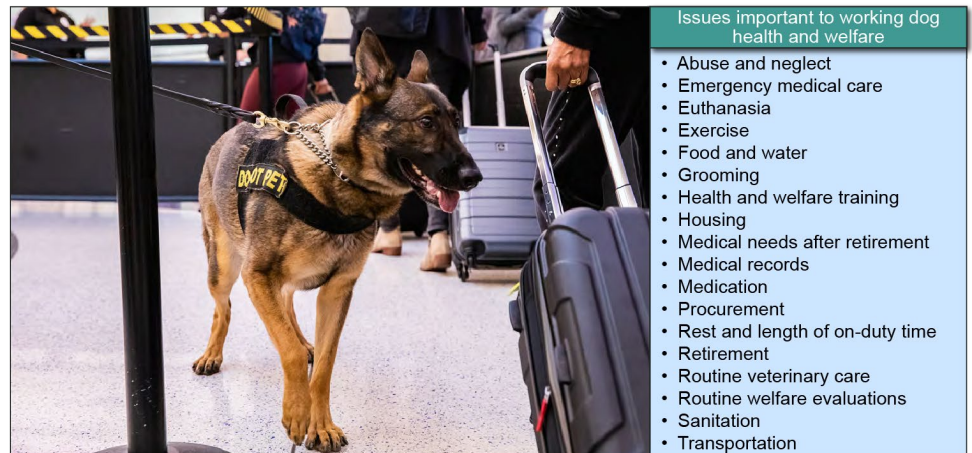
WORKING DOGS

Federal Agencies Need to Better Address Health and Welfare

What GAO Found

As of February 2022, about 5,100 working dogs served the federal government in 40 federally managed programs within eight departments and three independent agencies. In addition, approximately 400 working dogs served the federal government in 24 contractor-managed programs within eight departments and two independent agencies. Officials from federally and contractor-managed working dog programs most commonly reported using working dogs to detect explosives (see fig.) or narcotics, among other things.

Working Dog Searching for Explosives at a U.S. Airport, and the 18 Issues That GAO Identified as Important to Working Dog Health and Welfare



Sources: Transportation Security Administration and GAO analysis of agency documents. | GAO-23-104489

Federally and contractor-managed working dog programs address the health and welfare of dogs in policies and contract-related documents. Some of these programs' policies address all 18 issues GAO identified as important to the health and welfare of working dogs (see fig.), but most do not. For example, about half of the federally managed programs do not address abuse and neglect or requirements for rest and duration of on-duty working time in their policies. Similarly, about half of the contractor-managed programs do not address abuse and neglect or how to handle working dog retirement or euthanasia decisions in their contract-related documents. One contractor-managed program did not address any of the 18 important issues GAO identified.

Three Department of State programs were providing more than 1,000 working dogs to foreign partners, primarily for explosives and narcotics detection, as of February 2022. All three State Department programs have standards to help ensure that foreign partners are maintaining the health and welfare of these dogs. One of the three programs addressed all 18 health and welfare issues, while the other two did not. Addressing all 18 of the issues GAO identified for federally managed programs, future contracts, and standards for foreign partners, as appropriate, can help ensure that federal agencies adequately provide for the health and welfare of their working dogs. This, in turn, would help ensure the dogs' humane treatment and optimal performance.