

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104210](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2020, non-containerized cargo accounted for about 32 percent of the \$1.5 trillion total maritime cargo value. Non-containerized cargo includes goods, such as liquids, grains, and those transported individually or packaged and shipped on pallets or crates. GAO was asked to review CBP's policies and procedures for securing non-containerized maritime cargo.

This report examines the extent to which CBP's inspections of inbound non-containerized maritime cargo vary across selected U.S. seaports.

GAO reviewed CBP policies, procedures, and documentation for inspecting inbound non-containerized maritime cargo. GAO also interviewed CBP headquarters and field officials to gather information about how the agency implemented the policies and procedures. This included interviewing officials from a non-generalizable sample of 11 U.S. seaports and four field offices. GAO selected seaports that varied based on port size (i.e. total volume of cargo processed), types of non-containerized maritime cargo processed, and geographic location.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CBP (1) identify additional actions that CBP personnel at seaports should take to address the identified risks of crated cargo and (2) update national maritime cargo processing guidance to reflect the identified actions. The Department of Homeland Security concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-22-104210](#). For more information, contact Heather MacLeod at (202) 512-8777 or MacLeodH@gao.gov.

June 2022

MARITIME CARGO SECURITY

CBP Should Provide Additional Guidance for Certain Non-Containerized Cargo Inspections

What GAO Found

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) policies and guidance allow for variation in maritime port of entry (seaport) inspections of non-containerized cargo—goods not transported in traditional shipping containers—provided CBP personnel at seaports follow minimum inspection requirements. CBP's inspection procedures and practices for non-containerized cargo varied across the 11 seaports GAO reviewed. Local factors such as the availability of inspection equipment and the type and size of cargo contributed to this variation.

However, inspection approaches at some seaports GAO reviewed may not fully address the increasing risks related to one type of non-containerized cargo—crated cargo. Specifically, CBP's guidance states that some crated non-containerized cargo has grown in size and these shipments pose increasing levels of risk in the maritime environment. This is because crated cargo offers the same level of concealment for contraband or other restricted items as a shipping container and may present additional barriers to examination.

Examples of Crated Non-Containerized Cargo



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection. | GAO-22-104210

CBP inspection requirements for all non-containerized cargo provide that CBP personnel at seaports are to review information for shipments identified as high-risk. Further, personnel are to, at minimum, physically examine shipments placed on hold for examination through its risk assessment process. However, CBP did not identify additional inspection actions above the minimum requirements for CBP personnel at seaports to address crated cargo risks.

At the nine seaports GAO reviewed that processed crated cargo, CBP applied a range of approaches to its inspections. For example, at five seaports, CBP had additional procedures that may address crated cargo's risk, such as subjecting all crated cargo shipments to examination. However, CBP's procedures at the other four seaports follow CBP's minimum requirements for examining shipments flagged as high-risk and do not subject other crated cargo to examination. As a result, these four seaports' procedures may not address the risks posed by other crated cargo shipments. By identifying additional actions to address crated cargo risks at seaports and updating guidance accordingly, CBP could better ensure it addresses these risks while implementing national policy in a uniform manner.