

*The Department of the Treasury
Office of Inspector General*

Report Title

PROTECTING THE PUBLIC: Security, Inspection, and Targeting of Vessel Containers at the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach Can Be Improved (OIG-03-041; issued December 26, 2002) (Limited Official Use)

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Synopsis

The U.S. Customs Service's (Customs) original mission of collecting revenue has expanded to include ensuring that all goods and services entering and exiting the United States comply with U.S. laws and regulations. A major goal of Customs is to prevent the smuggling of drugs into the country by creating an effective drug interdiction capability that disrupts smuggling organizations. Interdicting illegal drugs entering the United States is a key component of the Nation's drug control strategy. After September 11, 2001, Customs changed its primary mission from drug interdiction to combating terrorism.

Our audit of the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach was part of a series of planned audits at Customs seaports. The objective of these audits was to determine whether Customs targets, secures, and inspects vessel containers to prevent smuggling of implements of terrorism, drugs, and other contraband in an effective manner. The other ports we audited were Port Everglades, Charleston, New York/Newark, and Philadelphia. Together, these ports represent about two-thirds of the vessel container cargo entering the United States.

At the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, we found that additional actions were necessary to tighten security, intensify the inspection of vessel containers, and improve the targeting process. Our report provided 10 recommendations to the Customs Port Director to address these areas. We also reported two other matters requiring Customs headquarters action. These matters involved (1) targeting of in-bond shipments (cargo arriving at a seaport to be shipped under a Customs Bond to an inland port where the entry documents have been filed) and (2) recording Customs examination information and statistics.

Customs was divested from the Department of the Treasury to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in March 2003 pursuant to the Homeland Security Act of 2002. Accordingly, audit follow-up is the responsibility of DHS management.