



## HOMELAND SECURITY

# INS Cannot Locate Many Aliens Because It Lacks Reliable Address Information

Highlights of [GAO-03-188](#), a report to the Honorable Strom Thurmond, United States Senate, and George W. Gekas, Chairman, Subcommittee on Immigration, Border Security, and Claims, Committee on the Judiciary, House of Representatives

### Why GAO Did This Study

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the federal government's need to locate aliens in the United States was considerably heightened. Without reliable alien address information, the government is impeded in its ability to find aliens who represent a national security threat or who could help with the nation's anti-terrorism efforts. Requesters from both the Senate and House asked GAO to review the reliability of INS's alien address information and identify the ways it could be improved.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommendations to the Attorney General include instructing the Commissioner of INS to do the following:

- Publicize the change of address notification requirement.
- Establish procedures and controls to ensure that alien address information in all automated databases is complete, consistent, accurate, and current.
- Establish procedures and controls that permit INS to enforce the penalty provisions for noncompliance with the change of address notification requirement.
- Evaluate alternative approaches and their costs for obtaining or assembling complete alien address information.

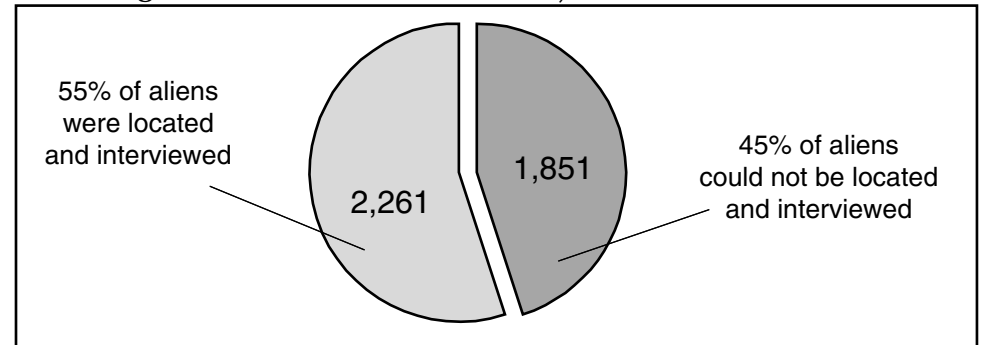
### What GAO Found

Recent events have shown that INS's alien address information could not be fully relied on to locate many aliens who were of interest to the United States. For example, the Department of Justice sought to locate and interview 4,112 aliens who were believed to be in the country and who might have knowledge that would assist the nation in its anti-terrorism efforts. However, as shown below, almost half of these aliens could not be located and interviewed because INS lacked reliable address information.

The reliability of INS's alien address information is contingent, in part, on aliens' compliance with the requirement that they notify INS of any change of address. However, lack of publicity about the requirement that aliens should file change of address notifications, no enforcement of penalties for noncompliance, and inadequate processing procedures for changes of address also contribute to INS's alien address information being unreliable. Because INS does not publicize the change of address requirement, some aliens may not be aware of it and may not comply with it. Alternatively, some aliens who are aware of the requirement may not comply because they do not wish to be located. These aliens have little incentive to comply given that INS does not enforce the penalties for noncompliance. On the basis of our review of available data, INS does not appear to have enforced the removal penalty for noncompliance since the early 1970s. When aliens do comply with the requirement, INS lacks adequate processing procedures and controls to ensure that the alien address information it receives is recorded in all automated databases.

Addressing these problems should help improve the reliability of INS's alien address information but would not necessarily result in a system that would allow INS to reliably locate all aliens, because some aliens will not likely comply. INS has recognized the need to increase the reliability of its alien address information and is taking some steps to improve it.

### DOJ Sought to Locate and Interview 4,112 Aliens



Source: GAO's analysis of the Executive Office for U.S. Attorneys' interview project data as of March 20, 2002.