Report In Brief

Why We Did This Review

With the threat of cyber attacks looming over government and private-sector computer networks, the Department of Commerce has become increasingly concerned about the safety of its sensitive information.

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) initiated this audit to address the Department's need for an information technology (IT) security workforce with the skills to protect Commerce's IT systems against cyber attacks.

OIG assessed the Department's efforts to develop and maintain an effective IT security workforce because we have long identified information security as a top challenge for management.

Background

Our audit focused on the IT security personnel at nine Commerce operating units.

We scrutinized the IT security employees' specialized training, certification, security clearances, and professional development efforts.

Our sample consisted of ll information systems at the operating units. We chose systems that we believed the Department and operating units would place particular emphasis on staffing with experienced and trained professionals.

Department of Commerce IT Security Workforce

Commerce Should Take Steps to Strengthen Its Information Technology Security Workforce

What We Found

In our audit, we discovered that the Department needs to devote more attention to the development and guidance of its IT security personnel who protect the Department's sensitive computer systems and information.

- Few of the operating units we reviewed were taking the necessary steps to meet training requirements or keep accurate training records. Moreover, professional development plans were not generally used.

- On the whole, performance management and accountability need to improve. We found several instances in which IT security responsibilities were not included in employees' formal performance plans. Also, personnel with significant security roles were not always formally notified of their duties.

- Finally, we found that some IT security personnel in the operating units we audited did not have the level of security clearance Department policy requires. The IT security workforce on the front line of protecting the Department's assets should have levels of clearance commensurate with their responsibilities.

What We Recommend

To develop and maintain an effective IT security workforce, we recommend Commerce implement a Department-wide plan that will address the deficiencies identified in this audit. We advise Commerce to make necessary revisions to its current IT security policy to support the plan. The plan should include actions to

- enhance the professional development of personnel with significant IT security responsibilities, including developing and implementing a requirement for IT security certifications;

- identify essential training, ensure workforce members receive appropriate role-based and security awareness training, and track the training that has been taken;

- formally document the roles and duties of employees having significant IT security responsibilities and include IT security as a critical element in their performance plans; and

- provide appropriate security clearances for IT security personnel.