

GAO Report Faults FBI's Auditing Methods

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The FBI's internal audit and inspection procedures do not meet federal standards, according to a new report by the General Accounting Office.

The study says the FBI's auditors often lack expertise, training and ex-

perience. They often focus on minor administrative, clerical and personnel problems rather than on priority investigative areas such as foreign counterintelligence, organized crime, white collar crime, antitrust and civil rights, the GAO said.

"To date, these reviews have not addressed major FBI programs or priorities," said GAO, a congressional watchdog agency.

The report has not yet been released, but a copy was obtained yesterday by The Washington Star. The study was performed at the request of the House Government Operations subcommittee on government information and individual rights, which monitors many FBI activities.

GAO said that FBI auditors lacked the necessary independence and objectivity because they often had close ties to the individuals in charge of the very programs they were auditing. The FBI's structure does not encourage "the iconoclasm of the independent critic," who would question "the very premises on which activities are based," GAO said.

tors failed to uncover abuses such as unauthorized break-ins, wire-taps and mail-openings conducted by FBI agents.

A retired FBI agent, M. Wesley Swearingen, charged this month that agents had engaged in numerous improper activities such as the fabrication of evidence, falsification of expense accounts, misuse of government vehicles and the theft of funds intended as payments for informants.

The GAO said that FBI auditors do not coordinate their work with their parent agency, the Department of Justice, and do not regularly provide the Justice Department with copies or even a synopsis of completed inspection reports.

"Department audit reports are available to the FBI, but FBI reports are not available to the department," GAO said.

Assistant Attorney General Kevin D. Rooney said he "basically concurs" with the GAO's conclusion that the FBI needs a "more qualified and permanent staff."

PART OF THE problem is that the FBI uses the inspection staff as one step on the career ladder to prepare employees for executive positions such as special agent in charge of a field office.

As a result, GAO said, FBI auditors' "qualifications did not generally meet federal audit standards."

Likewise, it said, the FBI's auditing manuals, plans and procedures failed to meet federal audit standards.

GAO said that FBI auditors spent time on housekeeping details such as introffice mail flow, stenographic pools and index card files while neglecting truly important operations.

GAO offered these examples from field office inspection reports: "Reduce the automotive fleet by one vehicle. Correct tab system used in closed file section. . . . Institute procedures for validating indexes in order to reduce number of misfiled cards. . . . Maintain certain index cards in a locked cabinet. . . . Close 18 of the 1,853 investigative cases reviewed."

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