

July 1, 2002

Mr. John S. Carr
President
National Air Traffic Controllers Association
1325 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Carr:

Thank you for your letter of February 1, 2002, concerning computer security and operational stability of the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Cru-X system. As you know, FAA plans to install Cru-X, which is designed to collect information concerning payroll, personnel, training, and quality assurance, at about 400 air traffic control facilities. To address your concerns regarding the vulnerability of Cru-X, we observed Cru-X operations at selected sites. We also performed a vulnerability assessment with an automated scanning tool and reviewed FAA's plan to convert Cru-X from the existing Access database to an Oracle database.

Based on our review, we found that there were no major vulnerabilities with the Cru-X computer system. FAA already was taking steps to address computer security issues and better secure personnel and payroll information within the Cru-X system. To do this, FAA is placing Cru-X on dedicated computers with enhanced computer security by August 2002. FAA's planned conversion to an Oracle database also should provide Cru-X with better operational stability. The following are our detailed results.

FAA Is Taking Steps to Enhance Cru-X Computer Security. Our vulnerability assessment disclosed that the Cru-X computer also serves other administrative functions, such as hosting internal web sites. To accomplish other functions, the Cru-X computer is configured to allow user access with network services. Consequently, personnel and payroll information in the Cru-X database could be vulnerable to unauthorized access. However, FAA already recognized this vulnerability and is implementing a plan to move Cru-X to dedicated computers with better access security. As of June 12, 2002, FAA reported it had installed dedicated computers at 121 sites and will move all Cru-X databases to dedicated computers by August 2002. This will significantly mitigate the vulnerability to unauthorized access.

FAA also could strengthen controls over Cru-X user passwords. For example, users' identification codes also were used as passwords, and users were not required to periodically change passwords. This is a simple but important control because passwords could be compromised (stolen or guessed) over time. FAA has agreed to take corrective action to ensure adequate password protection.

FAA Is Converting to an Oracle Database. FAA is in the process of converting the Cru-X computer code from Access to Oracle, which provides a more reliable and robust platform for large user environments like air traffic control facilities. Converting Cru-X from Access to Oracle should address your concerns with the operational stability of the Cru-X platform.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexis M. Stefani". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Alexis M. Stefani
Assistant Inspector General for Auditing

cc: FAA Administrator