

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Committee on  
Government Reform, House of  
Representatives

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September 2006

# HOMELAND SECURITY

## Federal Protective Service Could Better Measure the Performance of Its Control Centers



## HOMELAND SECURITY



Highlights of [GAO-06-1076](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Protective Service (FPS) through its control centers (MegaCenters) helps provide for the security and protection of federally owned and leased facilities. This report (1) identifies the services MegaCenters provide, (2) determines how FPS assesses MegaCenter performance and whether FPS links MegaCenter performance measures to FPS-wide measures, and (3) examines how MegaCenters and selected organizations compare in the services they provide. To address these issues, GAO reviewed FPS's performance measures and past MegaCenter assessments, assessed the MegaCenters' performance measures, and interviewed officials and collected relevant information at FPS, the four MegaCenters, and nine selected security organizations.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct FPS to (1) establish MegaCenter performance measures that meet the attributes of successful performance measures, (2) develop a performance measure for the MegaCenters that corresponds to the FPS-wide performance measure of response time, and (3) routinely assess the extent to which MegaCenters meet established performance measures. DHS generally agreed with the findings and recommendations in this report.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-1076](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-1076).

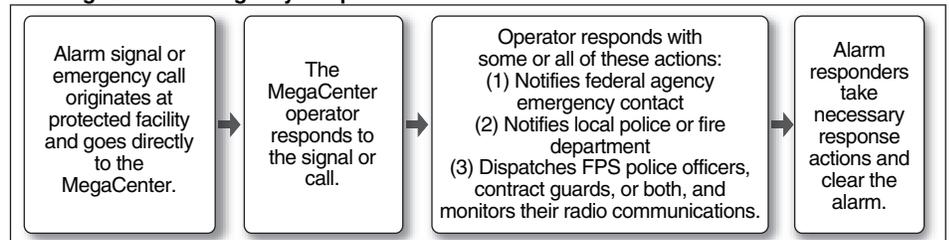
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Mathew Scire at (202) 512-2834 or [sciremj@gao.gov](mailto:sciremj@gao.gov).

# Federal Protective Service Could Better Measure the Performance of Its Control Centers

## What GAO Found

FPS MegaCenters provide three primary security services—alarm monitoring, radio monitoring, and dispatching of FPS police officers and contract guards. These and other services are provided around the clock from four locations—Battle Creek, Michigan; Denver, Colorado; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Suitland, Maryland. With a fiscal year 2006 budget of \$23.5 million, the MegaCenters monitor alarms at over 8,300 federal facilities, covering almost 381 million square feet, and have available for dispatch over 7,800 FPS police officers and contract guards.

### The MegaCenter Emergency Response Process



Source: GAO analysis of FPS data.

FPS MegaCenter managers assess MegaCenter operations through a variety of means, including reviewing data about volume and timeliness of operations, listening to and evaluating a sample of calls between operators and FPS police officers and contract guards, and receiving informal feedback about customer satisfaction. FPS managers have also developed performance measures for assessing MegaCenter operations. However, these measures are of limited use because they are not always clearly stated or measurable and do not address governmentwide priorities of efficiency, cost of service, and outcome—which are among the attributes that GAO has identified for successful performance measures. In addition, the MegaCenters do not measure a key activity—the time from alarm to officer dispatch—that would link MegaCenter performance to an FPS-wide performance measure of response time. Without a corresponding measure, FPS is limited in its ability to evaluate the MegaCenters' contribution to the FPS-wide measure of response time.

Nine selected security organizations—including federal and local police and private entities—offer some of the MegaCenters' services as well as provide and assess these services in a manner that is generally similar to the MegaCenters. Like the MegaCenters, many of the selected organizations have centralized their operations. They also use regular call reviews and volume and time measures to assess the quality of the services they provide. A major difference between the MegaCenters and some selected organizations is the use of a computer-aided dispatch system, which enables these organizations to automate many functions.

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## Abbreviations

CAD	computer-aided dispatch
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FPS	Federal Protective Service
GSA	General Services Administration
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IT	information technology
UL	Underwriters Laboratories

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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

September 29, 2006

The Honorable Tom Davis  
Chairman  
Committee on Government Reform  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Since the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, terrorism has threatened the nation's security, including the physical security of federal facilities. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a new federal department with the mission of preventing terrorist attacks within the United States, which includes safeguarding federal facilities.<sup>1</sup> DHS, through its Federal Protective Service (FPS), provides law enforcement and security services to federal agencies that occupy facilities under the jurisdiction of the General Services Administration (GSA) and DHS, protecting millions of federal employees, contractors, and citizens.<sup>2</sup> As part of its approach to facility protection, FPS provides support for its law enforcement and security services through four control centers known as MegaCenters that are located in Battle Creek, Michigan; Denver, Colorado; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Suitland, Maryland.

Because of the important role MegaCenters play in ensuring the safety of federal facilities and their occupants, our objectives were to (1) identify the services the MegaCenters provide and how they provide them, (2) determine how FPS assesses and measures the performance of MegaCenter operations and how FPS links MegaCenter performance measures to FPS-wide performance measures, and (3) examine how the MegaCenters compare to selected security organizations in the services they provide and in the methods they use to provide them.

To determine the services offered by the MegaCenters and how the MegaCenters provide these services, we interviewed managers at the four

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<sup>1</sup>Federal facilities include government-owned and -leased space.

<sup>2</sup>Under agreement, FPS authority can be extended to provide its law enforcement and security services to any property with a significant federal interest.

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MegaCenters and the MegaCenter branch chief, toured three MegaCenters—Denver, Philadelphia, and Suitland, collected information on services and workload data from MegaCenter management, and conducted document reviews. To determine how FPS assesses MegaCenter performance and how FPS links MegaCenter performance measures to FPS-wide performance measures, we reviewed documentation on FPS's performance measures and past MegaCenter assessments and interviewed MegaCenter management and FPS headquarters officials. We also assessed the MegaCenters' 11 performance measures to determine whether they were consistent with selected attributes of successful performance measures we have identified, that is, that they were linked to agency mission and goals; clearly stated; contained measurable targets; sufficiently covered the program's core activities; and addressed governmentwide priorities of quality, timeliness, efficiency, cost of service, and outcome.<sup>3</sup>

To determine how the MegaCenters compare to selected security organizations we (1) identified criteria for selecting comparable organizations and selected four public and five private organizations; (2) interviewed officials at the nine selected organizations; (3) toured four of the organizations' control centers—both public and private—to observe their security operations, procedures, and technology; (4) collected detailed service and workload information from the organizations; (5) used the information gathered to compare the MegaCenters and the selected organizations with respect to services offered, organizational structure, quality assessment practices, and technology utilization; and (6) interviewed officials from security industry standard-setting and accreditation associations (associations) because these associations were identified as having information on security industry organizations, operations, quality assessment practices, and technology utilization practices.<sup>4</sup> We used two approaches for selecting the private and public organizations. We selected private organizations from industry lists of the top 20 largest security service providers and system integrators in terms of 2005 revenue that provided services such as alarm monitoring and access

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<sup>3</sup>We did not assess whether the performance measures were objective, reliable, overlapping, or balanced.

<sup>4</sup>We interviewed officials from the following associations: Association of Public Safety Communications Officials, the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, the National Burglar and Fire Alarm Association, the National Fire Protection Association, Priority Dispatch, the Security Industry Association, and Underwriters Laboratories.

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control.<sup>5</sup> With the help of one of the associations we interviewed, we were able to make contact with the five security organizations that were selected as our comparison group.<sup>6</sup> For public organization comparisons, we selected three federal organizations: U.S. Postal Inspection Service, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and U.S. Park Police. We selected these federal organizations because each had a law enforcement branch; centralized control center(s) that offered, at a minimum, one of the MegaCenters' primary services; and nationwide operations, characteristics most similar to those of the MegaCenters. We also selected the Denver Police Department to serve as a nonfederal public organization that provided dispatch and radio monitoring services through a central control center. Because we judgmentally selected the organizations, the information we collected from them cannot be generalized. We conducted our work from October 2005 through September 2006 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

This report summarizes the information we provided to your office during our August 14, 2006, briefing and, in addition, contains recommendations to the Secretary of Homeland Security to improve the MegaCenters' performance measures. The briefing slides are included in appendix I.

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## Results in Brief

The primary services that FPS MegaCenters provide are remote monitoring of building alarm systems as well as radio monitoring and dispatch of FPS police officers and contract guards. These and other services are provided around the clock from four locations across the country: Battle Creek, Denver, Philadelphia, and Suitland. Each MegaCenter has a sister center with redundant capabilities that can serve as an emergency backup, and each is operated by full-time federal employees and private contractors. In fiscal year 2006, the MegaCenters had a budget of \$23.5 million—accounting for about 5 percent of FPS's total budget—to protect and

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<sup>5</sup>We looked at two lists: one was in terms of gross revenue, the other was in terms of revenue.

<sup>6</sup>In specific situations, two of the private security organizations dispatched either contract guards or their own guards. However, because these were situational circumstances, we did not include them as being similar to the MegaCenters' dispatching service. For example, one organization only uses contract guards when local jurisdictions will not dispatch their own police officers without actual verification of the nature of the alarm. In these cases, the organization will have a guard check whether there is a burglary in progress, and if so, the organization will contact the police.

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monitor over 8,300 federal facilities and dispatch over 7,800 FPS police officers and contract guards. To provide these services, the MegaCenters rely on a variety of information technology (IT) systems, communications systems, and other equipment.

FPS MegaCenter managers assess MegaCenter activities through a variety of means, including reviewing reports on the timeliness and volume of operations, listening to and evaluating a sample of calls between operators and FPS police officers and contract guards, and receiving informal feedback about customer satisfaction. Also, FPS managers have developed performance measures for assessing MegaCenter operations. These performance measures reflect some of the attributes of successful performance measures we have identified, but also contain some weaknesses because they are not always clearly stated or measurable and do not address the governmentwide priorities of efficiency, cost of service, and outcome. In addition, the MegaCenters do not have a performance measure that corresponds to the FPS-wide performance measure that is applicable to the MegaCenters' operations—the patrol and response time measure, which tracks the elapsed time from the receipt of an alarm to a police officer's arrival on the scene.<sup>7</sup> While the FPS-wide patrol and response time measure covers the MegaCenters' activities and reflects their performance, the MegaCenters do not have their own measure that covers only the activities for which they are responsible—from the receipt of the alarm to the officer's dispatch. Without clearly stated and measurable performance measures, including a measure that corresponds to FPS's agencywide patrol and response time measure, FPS cannot compare the MegaCenters' performance over time, assess their contribution to agencywide measures, and identify opportunities for their improvement. We are recommending that FPS (1) establish MegaCenter performance measures that meet the attributes of successful performance measures we have identified; (2) develop a performance measure for the MegaCenters that corresponds to the FPS-wide patrol and response time measure and covers the MegaCenters' operations, from alarm to dispatch; and (3) routinely assess the extent to which the MegaCenters meet established performance measures. In commenting on a draft of this report, DHS generally agreed with our findings and recommendations.

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<sup>7</sup>In addition to patrol and response time, FPS has three other agencywide performance measures (1) timely deployment of countermeasures, (2) functionality of countermeasures, and (3) facility security index (an average success rate for the other measures).

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The nine selected security organizations offer some of the same security services as the MegaCenters, and the services the organizations offer are delivered and assessed in a manner generally similar to that of the MegaCenters. For example, like the MegaCenters, many organizations have centralized their control center operations, have backup capability, allocate workload among centers based on geographic location, and use regular call reviews as well as volume and time measures to assess the quality of the services they provide. A few organizations offer services that the MegaCenters do not offer. One major difference between the MegaCenters and the organizations is that three organizations use a computer-aided dispatch (CAD) system. Selected organizations and associations referred to CAD systems as being beneficial for dispatching services by allowing for faster operator response, automatic recording of all operator actions enabling easier performance analysis, and automatic operator access to standard operating procedures and response prioritization. MegaCenters have identified a need and developed a plan for a CAD system, but FPS has not allocated funding for such a system.

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## MegaCenters Provide Alarm and Radio Monitoring and Dispatch from Four Locations

FPS MegaCenters provide federal agencies with three primary security services—alarm monitoring, radio monitoring, and dispatch—through four locations using a variety of IT systems. MegaCenters monitor intrusion, panic, fire/smoke, and other alarms. They also monitor FPS police officers' and contract guards' radio communication to ensure their safety and to provide information, such as criminal background or license plate histories, to officers upon request. In addition, they exercise command and control authority by dispatching FPS police officers or contract guards. MegaCenters also provide a variety of other services. For example, they notify federal agencies regarding national emergencies and facility problems and remotely diagnose problems with federal agency alarms. They also receive and transcribe FPS police officer incident reports. Individual MegaCenters may also provide unique services not provided by other MegaCenters, such as facility-specific access control and remote programming of alarms via the Internet. One MegaCenter also provides an after-hours telephone answering service for the Drug Enforcement Administration and for GSA building maintenance emergencies.

The MegaCenters are located in Battle Creek, Denver, Philadelphia, and Suitland. Each MegaCenter has a sister center with redundant capability as backup in case of a failure at that MegaCenter. Suitland is paired with Battle Creek, and Philadelphia is paired with Denver. A force of 1,014 FPS police officers and 6,842 contract guards is available for the MegaCenters

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to dispatch in response to alarms and other emergencies. In fiscal year 2006, the MegaCenters were supported by a budget of \$23.5 million, which accounts for about 5 percent of FPS's total budget.<sup>8</sup> The MegaCenters are operated by 23 full-time federal employees—some of whom manage the centers—and about 220 private contractors to provide around the clock security services for over 8,300 federal facilities.

The MegaCenters rely on a variety of IT systems, communications systems, and other equipment to provide their security services. The IT systems enable MegaCenter staff to, among other activities, monitor alarms and radio communications of FPS police officers and contract guards. For communications systems, MegaCenters have regional and national toll-free numbers for tenants and the public to contact the MegaCenters during emergencies. Other equipment includes dictation machines, which enable FPS police officers to dictate reports about incidents that occur at facilities.

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## MegaCenters' and FPS's Performance Measures Are Not Linked

MegaCenters use various means to assess operations, but their performance measures have weaknesses and are not linked to FPS-wide performance measures. MegaCenter managers assess MegaCenter operations through a variety of means, including reviewing data about volume and timeliness of operations, listening to and evaluating a sample of calls between operators and FPS police officers and contract guards, and receiving informal feedback about customer satisfaction. FPS managers also have developed 11 performance measures for assessing MegaCenter operations:

- distribute emergency notification reports (also known as SPOT reports) within 30 minutes of notification;
- review problem alarm reports daily;
- obtain regular feedback about customer satisfaction from field operations;
- continuously review all SPOT reports and other outgoing information to ensure 100 percent accuracy;

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<sup>8</sup>As of August 2006, MegaCenter officials reported a revised MegaCenter budget of approximately \$19 million for fiscal year 2006.

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- transcribe dictated offense and incident reports into the database management system within 8 hours of receipt of the report;
  - submit reviewed contractor billing reports and time sheets within 7 business days after the last day of the month;
  - prepare and review contractor reports for quality assurance plan;
  - maintain completely accurate (nonduplicative) case control numbers;
  - meet Underwriters Laboratories (UL) guidelines and requirements continuously;<sup>9</sup>
  - test failover of alarm, radio, and telephone systems weekly;<sup>10</sup> and
  - monitor calls and review recorded call content for adherence to standard procedures at least monthly.

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 requires federal agencies to, among other things, measure agency performance in achieving outcome-oriented goals. Measuring performance allows organizations to track the progress they are making toward their goals and gives managers critical information on which to base decisions for improving their progress. We have previously reported on some of the most important attributes of successful performance measures. These attributes indicate that performance measures should (1) be linked to an agency's mission and goals; (2) be clearly stated; (3) have quantifiable targets or other measurable values; (4) be reasonably free of significant bias or manipulation that would distort the accurate assessment of performance; (5) provide a reliable way to assess progress; (6) sufficiently cover the program's core activities; (7) have limited overlap with other measures; (8) have balance or not emphasize one or two priorities at the expense of

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<sup>9</sup>UL certifies control centers that provide all elements of service required by UL's standards, including appropriate operator response to fire alarm signals and proper equipment inspection, testing, and maintenance.

<sup>10</sup>"Failover" is the capability to switch over automatically to a redundant or standby system in the event of a system failure. Each MegaCenter tests its ability to run its sister-center's operations in case that center has system failure.

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others; and (9) address governmentwide priorities of quality, timeliness, efficiency, cost of service, and outcome.<sup>11</sup>

We assessed the 11 FPS MegaCenter performance measures against selected attributes: linkage to mission and goals, clarity, and measurable targets. Ten of the 11 MegaCenter performance measures were aligned with FPS's mission to protect federal properties and personnel and with the MegaCenter program's mission to provide high-quality and standardized alarm monitoring, radio monitoring, and dispatch. We found no link between timely review of contractor time sheets and billing statements and FPS's mission, however, primarily because this measure seems to be related to administrative activities. In addition, while 6 of the 11 performance measures have measurable targets—a key component for measuring performance, none of the MegaCenter performance measures met the clarity attribute because FPS could not provide information about how managers calculate the measures—a key component in the clarity attribute. For example, the performance measure that the centers test the failover ability of alarm, radio, and telephone systems weekly is measurable because it has a quantifiable target but does not meet the clarity attribute because FPS could not describe its methodology for calculating it.

We also assessed whether, collectively, the MegaCenters' 11 performance measures sufficiently cover their core program activities (i.e., alarm monitoring, radio monitoring, and dispatch) and address governmentwide priorities of quality, timeliness, efficiency, cost of service, and outcome. Most of the MegaCenter performance measures relate to the three core activities. For example, regular feedback on customer service and monthly review of operator calls cover aspects of the dispatch and radio-monitoring functions. Other performance measures, like distributing emergency notification reports in 30 minutes, help fulfill other critical support functions. However, two performance measures—reviewing contractor quality assurance plans and timely review of contractor time sheets and billing statements—relate to administrative activities that are not strictly related to MegaCenter core activities. Additionally, the MegaCenter performance measures do not collectively address all of the governmentwide priorities. The MegaCenter performance measures primarily address the governmentwide priorities of quality and timeliness.

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<sup>11</sup>See GAO, *Tax Administration: IRS Needs to Further Refine Its Tax Filing Season Performance Measures*, [GAO-03-143](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 22, 2002), pp.2-3, 46-53.

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For example, the MegaCenter measures pertaining to transcribing reports within 8 hours and reviewing recorded calls to see if the operator followed standard operating procedures address aspects of service timeliness and quality, respectively. None of the measures relate to the governmentwide priorities of efficiency, cost of service, and outcome.

Finally, FPS does not link MegaCenter performance measures to FPS-wide performance measures, specifically the patrol and response time measure. FPS established FPS-wide performance measures to assess its efforts to reduce or mitigate building security risks. The performance measures that FPS established were (1) timely deployment of countermeasures, (2) functionality of countermeasures, (3) patrol and response time, and (4) facility security index. The one measure that relates to the MegaCenters—patrol and response time—assesses FPS’s ability to respond to calls for service and measures the average elapsed time from when a law enforcement request is received (e.g., alarm, telephonic request from a building tenant, FPS police officer-initiated call) to the time an officer arrives at the scene. FPS’s goal is to reduce response times by 10 percent in fiscal year 2006. The MegaCenters are responsible for part of the patrol and response activity that is being measured because the MegaCenters receive alarms and emergency calls and dispatch FPS police officers or contract guards to the scene. However, although data pertaining to this activity exist in the MegaCenters’ records management system, they do not measure the timeliness of this activity, and FPS has not developed a performance measure that would identify the MegaCenters’ contribution toward meeting FPS’s measure.

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## Nine Selected Organizations Provide Some of the MegaCenters’ Services in a Generally Comparable Manner

The nine selected security organizations generally do not provide all three of the MegaCenters’ primary services. However, the services these organizations offer are provided similarly by the MegaCenters with the exception of a CAD system, which three organizations use and the MegaCenters do not. The MegaCenters provide three primary services (i.e., alarm monitoring, radio monitoring, and dispatch), and the selected organizations provide all or some of these three main services. For example, the Park Police provide all three services, while the private organizations focus on providing alarm monitoring and offer some services the MegaCenters do not. Like the MegaCenters, all of the private organizations reviewed have centralized operations: the number of their national control centers ranges from two to five. Work allocation (i.e., how incoming alarms and calls are assigned) among centers varies by organization but overall is similar to the MegaCenter structure. For

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example, most of the organizations assign calls and alarms to a specific center based on the geographic location of the call or signal. However, the Postal Inspection Service and one private organization are unique because they are able to allocate workload to centers based on demand and operator availability. The organizations use a variety of methods to measure the quality of their services, many similar to methods used by the MegaCenters. For example, like the MegaCenters, most review a sample of operator calls on a regular basis. Two entities have established measurable performance goals for their centers. While there are similarities in the services offered, number of centers, work allocation, and service quality appraisals between the organizations reviewed and the MegaCenters, three organizations use a CAD system, which the MegaCenters do not. A CAD system is a tool used by the Denver Police Department for dispatching and officer tracking and by the Postal Inspection Service for officer tracking. The Park Police also uses a CAD system with limited capabilities at its San Francisco center and plans to purchase and upgrade the system for all three of its centers. Selected organizations and associations referred to CAD systems as being beneficial for dispatching services by allowing for faster operator response, automatic operator access to standard operating procedures and response prioritization, and automatic recording of operator actions enabling easier performance analysis. Since 2003, FPS and DHS both have assessed MegaCenter technology and have identified needs for technology upgrades, including the installation of a CAD system for the MegaCenters. Our guide on IT investment decision making—based on best practices in the public and private sector—stresses that part of achieving maximum benefits from an IT project requires that decisions be made on a regular basis about the status of the project.<sup>12</sup> To make these decisions, senior managers need assessments of the project's impact on mission performance and future prospects for the project. While the MegaCenters have assessed their technology on many occasions and have determined that some refreshment is needed, FPS has not yet allocated the funding for such upgrades.

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## Conclusions

FPS MegaCenters play a key role in protecting federal facilities, those who enter these facilities, and the FPS police officers and contract guards whose calls the MegaCenters respond to and monitor. How well the MegaCenters are fulfilling their role and carrying out their responsibilities

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<sup>12</sup>GAO, *Assessing Risks and Returns: A Guide for Evaluating Federal Agencies' IT Investment Decision-making*, GAO/AIMD-10.1.13 (Washington, D.C.: February 1997).

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is uncertain because they do not generate much of the information that would be useful for assessing their performance.

To their credit, the MegaCenters have established performance measures for a number of their activities and operations, and these measures are aligned with the MegaCenters' mission. However, the measures have weaknesses, both individually and collectively, compared with the selected attributes of successful performance measures that we have identified. Many of the individual measures are neither quantifiable nor clearly stated, and collectively the measures do not address the governmentwide priorities of efficiency, cost of service, and outcome. As a result, FPS cannot compare performance across the MegaCenters or over time, and without such information, FPS is limited in its ability to identify shortfalls and target improvements.

Although FPS has established an FPS-wide performance measure for response time—from the alarm to the FPS police officer's arrival on the scene—that incorporates the MegaCenters' operations, the MegaCenters have not established a comparable measure for their operations alone. Without such a measure, FPS cannot evaluate the MegaCenters' contribution—from the alarm to the FPS police officer's dispatch—to the FPS-wide measure for response time and identify opportunities for improvement.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

We recommend that the Secretary of Homeland Security direct the Director of the Federal Protective Service to take the following three actions:

- establish MegaCenter performance measures that meet the attributes of successful performance measures we have identified;
- develop a performance measure for the MegaCenters that is directly linked to the FPS-wide response time measure and covers the scope of the MegaCenters' operations, from alarm to dispatch; and
- routinely assess the extent to which the MegaCenters meet established performance measures.

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## Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DHS, the Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Postal Service for their review and comment. DHS provided comments in a letter dated September 6, 2006, which are summarized below and reprinted in appendix II. DHS also provided technical comments, which we incorporated into the report where appropriate. The Postal Service informed us that it had no comments on this report. The Department of the Interior did not provide comments on this report.

DHS generally agreed with the report's findings and recommendations. DHS stated that FPS and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) have undertaken a comprehensive review of the MegaCenters to identify, among other things, ways in which performance can be better measured. DHS noted that through this broad approach, FPS personnel will be able to generate and track the kind of information necessary to assess the MegaCenters' performance. This one-time review may help FPS identify information needed to assess the MegaCenters' performance and, therefore, develop appropriate performance measures. In order to reliably assess performance over time, FPS should not only establish appropriate performance measures, but also routinely assess performance using these measures. We therefore clarified our recommendation to include the routine use of established performance measures to assess the MegaCenters' performance. With regard to the report's discussion of CAD system capabilities, DHS said that ICE's Chief Information Officer is currently assessing the MegaCenters' technology requirements and recognizes that previous studies have identified the need for technology upgrades. DHS indicated that the current assessment will have a meaningful impact on FPS's technology capabilities.

As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies of this report to other interested congressional committees and the Secretary of Homeland Security, and DHS's Assistant Secretary for Immigration and Customs Enforcement. We will also make copies available to others upon request. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

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If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact me at (202) 512-2834 or [sciremj@gao.gov](mailto:sciremj@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.

Sincerely yours,

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

Mathew J. Scire  
Acting Director, Physical Infrastructure Issues

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# Briefing for the Committee on Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives, August 14, 2006

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## Review of the Federal Protective Service's MegaCenters

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Briefing for the Committee on Government Reform  
U.S. House of Representatives

August 14, 2006

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- Introduction and Objectives
- Scope and Methodology
- Results in Brief
- Background
- Results of GAO Work



## Introduction

- Since the 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City and the September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, terrorism has threatened the nation's security, including the physical security of federal facilities.
- The Homeland Security Act of 2002 created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), a new federal department with the mission of preventing terrorist attacks within the United States, which includes safeguarding federal facilities.<sup>1</sup>
- DHS, through its Federal Protective Service (FPS), provides law enforcement and security services to federal agencies that occupy almost 9,000 facilities under the jurisdiction of the General Services Administration (GSA) and DHS, protecting millions of federal employees, contractors, and citizens. Under agreement, FPS authority can be extended to provide its law enforcement and security services to any property with a significant federal interest.
- As part of its approach to facility protection, FPS provides support for its law enforcement and security services through four control centers (known as MegaCenters) located in Battle Creek, Michigan; Denver, Colorado; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Suitland, Maryland.

<sup>1</sup>Facilities include government owned and lease space.



## Objectives

- Because of the important role MegaCenters play in assuring the safety of federal facilities and their occupants, our objectives were to:
  - (1) Identify the services the MegaCenters provide and how they provide them.
  - (2) Determine how FPS assesses and measures the performance of MegaCenter operations and how FPS links MegaCenter performance measures to FPS-wide performance measures.
  - (3) Examine how the MegaCenters compare to selected security organizations in the services they provide and in the methods they use to provide them.



## Scope and Methodology

- **Document review:** Reviewed the Memorandum of Agreement between GSA and FPS and other documentation related to MegaCenter services as well as documentation related to (1) FPS's request for a computer aided dispatch (CAD) system for the MegaCenters; (2) past FPS assessments of MegaCenter operations; (3) FPS's performance measures; and (4) FPS's budget for the MegaCenters.
- **Interviews:** Interviewed FPS officials, including MegaCenter branch chief and managers, and staff from the Program Review Office, Financial Management Division, and other offices; Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Budget Enforcement Office; and officials from selected public and private organizations; officials from security industry standard setting and accreditation associations (associations).
- **Selected organizations:**
  - U.S. Customs and Border Protection
  - U.S. Park Police
  - U.S. Postal Inspection Service
  - Denver Police Department
  - 5 private security companies
- We conducted our review in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.



- Remote monitoring of building alarm systems, radio monitoring, and dispatching of FPS police officers and contract guards are the primary services FPS MegaCenters provide. These and other services are provided around the clock from four locations across the country. Each MegaCenter has a sister center with redundant capabilities that can serve as an emergency backup and each is operated by full-time federal employees and private contractors. In addition, the MegaCenters have a fiscal year 2006 budget of \$23.5 million and use a variety of information technology (IT) systems and other equipment to provide their services.
- FPS MegaCenter managers assess MegaCenter operations through a variety of means, including reviewing information on the timeliness and volume of operations, listening to and evaluating a sample of calls between operators and FPS police officers and contract guards, and receiving informal feedback about customer satisfaction. FPS managers have also developed performance measures for assessing MegaCenter operations. Although these MegaCenter measures reflect some attributes of successful performance measures, they also contain some weaknesses because they are not always clearly stated or measurable, and do not address governmentwide priorities of efficiency, cost of service, and outcome. In addition, they do not directly measure key operations that would link to FPS-wide performance measures, which are (1) the timely deployment of countermeasures, (2) functionality of countermeasures, (3) patrol and response time, and (4) facility security index.



- The nine selected organizations offer some of the MegaCenters' primary services, and they deliver and assess the services they offer in a generally similar manner to the MegaCenters. For example, like the MegaCenters, many of these organizations have centralized their control center operations, have backup capability, allocate workload among control centers based on geographic location, and use regular call reviews as well as volume and time measures to assess the quality of the services they provide. A few organizations offer services the MegaCenters do not offer. One difference between the MegaCenters and the selected organizations is that three of these organizations use a CAD system, which the MegaCenters do not have. The MegaCenters have assessed their technology and have identified the need for a CAD; however FPS has not allocated funds for such a purchase.



## Background: FPS's funding structure

- FPS operations are solely funded through security fees and reimbursements collected from federal agencies for FPS security services.
  - These security fees consist of basic and building-specific security charges.
    - The basic security charges cover the security services that FPS provides to all federal tenants in FPS-protected buildings, which include such services as patrol, monitoring of building perimeter alarms and dispatching of law enforcement response (MegaCenter operations), criminal investigations, and security surveys.
    - The building-specific security charges are for FPS security measures that are designed for a particular building and are based on the FPS Building Security Assessment and its designated security level. Such measures include contract guards, X-ray machines, magnetometers, cameras, and intrusion detection alarms. Also, the tenant agencies may request additional security services such as more guards, access control systems, and perimeter barriers.
    - The above two charges are billed monthly to the tenant agencies. The basic security charge is the same for all tenants regardless of the type of space occupied and is a square footage rate. The building-specific security charge reflects FPS cost recovery for security measures specific to a particular building and the billing is handled differently for single- and multi-tenant buildings. Single tenant buildings—the tenant agency is billed for the total cost of the security measures. Multi-tenant buildings—the tenant agencies are billed based on their pro rata share of the square feet occupied within the respective building.
- FPS uses a reimbursable program to charge individual agencies for additional security services and equipment that they request above the level determined for their building.



Background: FPS's funding structure,  
continued

- FPS bills the tenant agencies for FPS security fees they have incurred.
  - The agencies pay the fees into an FPS account in the Department of the Treasury, which is administered by FPS. Congress exercises control over the account through the annual appropriations process that sets an annual limit—called obligation authority—on how much of the account FPS can expend for various activities.
  - FPS uses the security fees to finance its various activities within the limits that Congress sets. The Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2006 authorized \$487 million in obligation authority for FPS expenses and operations. Through FPS's security fees, funds are to be collected and credited to FPS's account as an offsetting collection from tenant agencies.
- Under the FPS reimbursable program, agencies request additional security services and equipment using a funded Security Work Authorization. Once the services are provided and the costs are expensed, FPS bills the agency for the costs, and the funds are transferred to the FPS account to offset the expenses FPS incurred.
- The DHS Inspector General reported in 2006 that when FPS was part of GSA it budgeted and paid for FPS's annual administrative support costs such as financial management, human capital, and IT using funds beyond those generated by security fees. GSA estimated these FY 2003 support services to cost about \$28 million. According to the report, beginning in FY 2004, neither DHS's annual budget request nor DHS's appropriations set aside funding for FPS's support services. In FY 2004, as a component of DHS, FPS paid almost \$24 million for support services using funds from security fees only; a year earlier these services had been funded by GSA using funds not derived from fees.



## Background: Evolution of the MegaCenters

- Before GSA established the MegaCenters, FPS used regional and satellite control centers to monitor alarm systems, dispatch FPS police officers and contract guards, and perform criminal background checks. In total, there were 22 regional control centers and 12 satellite control centers, which were located throughout FPS's 11 regions. Most regions had more than 1 control center.
- In 1991, GSA conducted an internal review of the control centers. The review found that because of significant budgetary and personnel constraints over more than a decade, the control centers no longer performed well enough to ensure safe, effective, and efficient FPS actions to preserve life and property. GSA contracted with Sandia National Laboratories— the lead laboratory for U.S. Department of Energy security systems— to conduct an in-depth study of the control centers' operation and make recommendations.
- In 1993, Sandia issued its study entitled *GSA Control Center Upgrade Program*. The Sandia study identified serious shortfalls and problems that would require a more radical upgrade of the control centers at a much higher cost than originally believed. After validating the study's findings, GSA determined that a multimillion dollar upgrade of all control centers would be prohibitively expensive. The study noted that the control centers could be consolidated to almost any level to achieve economies of scale. However, the study recommended against a single national-level control center because a second center would be needed to continue operations under catastrophe or failover conditions.



Background: Evolution of the MegaCenters,  
continued

- GSA concluded that the control center problems that the study identified were material weaknesses and reported them to Congress. FPS conducted an operational and technical review of the Sandia study's findings, which provided a critical assessment of the control centers, a high-level concept of operations for the centers, and functional specifications for upgrading the centers. GSA decided to upgrade 11 control centers—one in each region—and address the weaknesses that the study had identified.
- Within GSA, concerns were raised about the cost of upgrading 11 control centers, how many control centers were really needed, and whether the centers' operations could be outsourced. GSA established a project team to investigate these concerns. The team contacted several public and private sector organizations that operate control centers. The team found that the organizations were consolidating their control centers but were unable to assume the operations of FPS control centers. A decision was made to consolidate additional centers and the multi-regional control center or "MegaCenter" concept was developed. GSA endorsed the MegaCenter concept. GSA assembled a core project team and hired contractors to design, plan, and supervise the construction of the centers.



Background: Evolution of the MegaCenters,  
continued

- In 1994, GSA issued a bid for MegaCenter technical and performance specifications and awarded the contract.
- In 1996, FPS reaffirmed that the MegaCenter concept was the best approach for addressing the control center weaknesses. GSA selected the MegaCenters sites: Denver, CO; Battle Creek, MI; New York, NY and Suitland, MD.<sup>2</sup>
- In 1996, construction began on the Denver MegaCenter and design was initiated on the Battle Creek MegaCenter.
- In 1997, the Denver MegaCenter was opened, followed by Battle Creek in 1999, Suitland in 2000, and Philadelphia in 2001.

<sup>2</sup>Site selection for New York, NY was never finalized and eventually was switched to a site in Philadelphia, PA.



Objective 1: MegaCenters' primary  
services

- The MegaCenters' mission is to provide the highest quality, nationally standardized dispatch, alarm monitoring, and federal law enforcement emergency response services. Based on this mission statement, we chose to focus on alarm monitoring, radio monitoring, and dispatch as the primary services the FPS MegaCenters provide.
- Primary services:
  - Alarm monitoring: monitoring intrusion, panic, fire/smoke, elevator, and/or environmental alarms.
  - Radio monitoring: monitoring FPS police officers' and contract guards' radio communication for safety and providing information upon request.
  - Dispatch: exercising command and control authority by dispatching FPS police officers and/or contract guards.



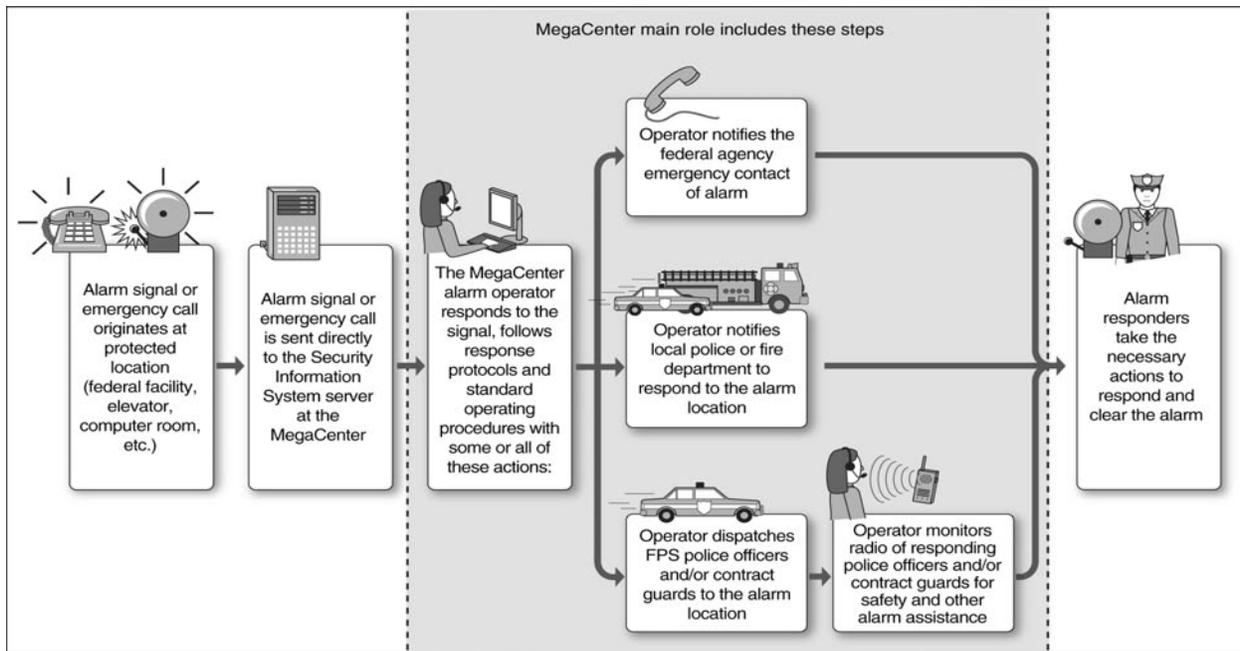
## Objective 1: MegaCenters provide other services

- Other services:
  - Notifying federal agencies regarding national emergencies and facility problems (also known as SPOT reports)
  - Checking criminal background histories (including inquiries to the National Crime Information Center database, which the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) maintains) for FPS police officers responding to a call or an alarm or FPS regions and other DHS agencies requesting this assistance
  - Receiving and transcribing FPS police officer reports
  - Providing a toll-free help desk line for agency support, including remote diagnosis and service of alarms
  - Updating quarterly building and emergency contact information from customer agencies to ensure accurate notifications and alerts
- Unique services (provided by individual MegaCenter):
  - Monitoring and controlling access to buildings
  - Using the Internet to program, monitor, and test alarms
  - Providing after-hours telephone answering service for Drug Enforcement Administration and for GSA maintenance



Objective 1: MegaCenters' responses to building alarms

Figure 1: MegaCenters' Operations for Responding to Alarms and Emergency Calls



Source: GAO.



Objective 1: MegaCenters provide services  
 to a variety of clients

**Table 1: Services Provided to MegaCenter Clients**

Services	GSA, DHS, and federal agency clients	FPS regions, police officers, and contract guards
Monitor remote building alarms	X	X
Dispatch FPS police officers, contract guards, and other response services	X	X
Monitor FPS police officers' and contract guards' radio communications for their safety		X
Keep track of FPS police officer and contract guard locations		X
Provide warrant and other information from the National Crime Information Center	X	X
Help maintain lists of buildings and contacts for emergency notifications	X	X



Objective 1: MegaCenters' organization for  
service delivery

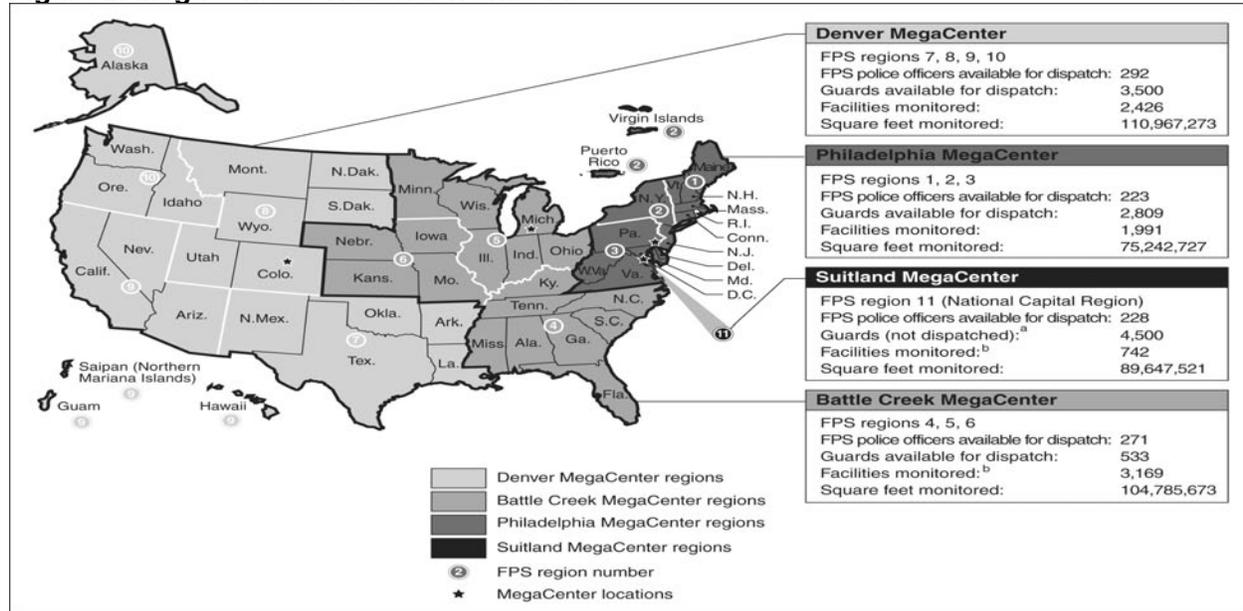
- MegaCenters are located in four cities and are responsible for providing various services in their respective FPS Regions:
  - Philadelphia, PA (FPS Regions 1, 2, 3)
  - Battle Creek, MI (FPS Regions 4, 5, 6)
  - Denver, CO (FPS Regions 7, 8, 9, 10)
  - Suitland, MD (FPS Region 11- National Capital Region)
  
- Each MegaCenter is paired with a sister center:
  - Suitland is paired with Battle Creek
  - Philadelphia is paired with Denver
  
- Sister center pairings provide for redundant capability in case of a catastrophic failure at any MegaCenter.



Objective 1: MegaCenter workloads

- As of June 2006, MegaCenters had available to them a dispatchable force of 1,014 FPS police officers and 6,842 contract guards to help protect and monitor 8,328 federal facilities covering almost 381 million square feet, which are mostly under the jurisdiction of GSA and DHS.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 2: MegaCenters' National Workload



<sup>a</sup>The Suitland MegaCenter typically does not dispatch its 4,500 contract guards. Due to the geographical area of the region and close proximity of GSA owned or leased facilities, only FPS police officers are dispatched.  
<sup>b</sup>The number of facilities monitored is a monthly average.

<sup>3</sup>Under agreement, other federal agencies may obtain MegaCenter alarm services for a fee. For example, the Denver MegaCenter provides alarm monitoring for some National Guard Armory and Air Force units. These units dispatch their own response teams when the MegaCenter receives an alarm and notifies the units. At the tenant agencies' request, private security firms also provide this service to some facilities under the jurisdiction of GSA and DHS.



Objective 1: FY 2006 federal and contractor staffing levels at each MegaCenter

- MegaCenters rely upon contractor staff to carry out dispatch and technical support services.
- Each MegaCenter also has FPS officials located on site to oversee the center’s overall operations.
- MegaCenters operate around the clock.

**Table 2: FY 2006 Actual Federal and Contractor Staffing Levels at Each MegaCenter**

MegaCenter	Federal staff	Primary Contractor	Contractor staff
Battle Creek	9	Wackenhut Services Inc. <sup>a</sup>	74
Denver	4	Gonzales Consulting Services <sup>a</sup>	56
Philadelphia	6	Gonzales Consulting Services	49
Suitland	4	Gonzales Consulting Services	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>		<b>217</b>

<sup>a</sup>The Battle Creek and Denver MegaCenters have other contracts for personnel to provide services, such as technical support, however, these contracts are small in terms of the number of personnel provided— three in Denver and five in Battle Creek.



Objective 1: Historical budget and  
MegaCenter allocations

- Recent FPS MegaCenter budgets:
  - Fiscal year 2004 \$20.0 million
  - Fiscal year 2005 \$21.5 million
  - Fiscal year 2006 \$23.5 million, which accounts for less than 5 percent of FPS's total budget.<sup>4</sup>
  
- Estimated fiscal year 2006 budget for each MegaCenter:
  - Suitland \$6.0 million
  - Philadelphia \$5.0 million
  - Battle Creek \$6.5 million
  - Denver \$6.0 million
  
- MegaCenter cost information for FY 2004 and prior years is not available since FPS transitioned from GSA's accounting system. FY 2005 and FY 2006 cost information is also not available because the ICE accounting system was not modified to capture costs solely for the MegaCenters. According to FPS, it is working with ICE to establish the capability in the accounting system to capture MegaCenter costs in the future.

<sup>4</sup>As of August 2006, MegaCenter officials reported a revised MegaCenter budget of approximately \$19 million for fiscal year 2006.



Objective 1: MegaCenters rely on IT systems to deliver services

- MegaCenters depend on a variety of IT systems and equipment to deliver their primary services.

**Table 3: Information Technology Systems That Support MegaCenters' Primary Services**

Information technology systems	Alarm monitoring	Radio monitoring	Dispatch
Security Information System and software (alarm receivers and signal receivers)	X	X	X
Facility and building client enterprise information systems	X	X	X
MegaCenter-owned telephone exchange system and regional and national toll-free emergency numbers	X	X	X
Remote programming software	X		
Radio systems	X	X	X
Patrol and dispatch operations logs	X	X	X
Voice audio recorders	X	X	X
Software that allows MegaCenters to access federal and state law enforcement databases		X	X

Source: GAO analysis of FPS data

- MegaCenters also depend on additional information technology systems, such as failover equipment and servers that facilitate sharing files with sister centers.



Objective 1: MegaCenters rely on IT systems  
to deliver services, continued

- Figure 3: MegaCenter Operator at Consoles Used for Alarm Monitoring, Radio Monitoring, and Dispatch.



Source: FPS Philadelphia MegaCenter



## Objective 2: MegaCenters use various means to assess operations

- Reports on operator activities—FPS MegaCenter supervisors—staff who are responsible for overseeing operators—review information about the timeliness and volume of operators’ activities. For example, they review reports that describe how long it took operators to send out emergency notifications and transcribe dictated reports and the number of problem alarms, among other things.
- Assessments of operator communications—Supervisors and designated quality assurance staff listen to live conversations between operators and FPS police officers and contract guards as well as regularly listen to a sample of taped conversations to identify whether operators are following standard operating procedures. According to MegaCenter managers, staff sample taped calls on a monthly basis.
- Comprehensive reviews of MegaCenter operations—In 2003 and 2004, the MegaCenter managers completed a manager review of each MegaCenter. These reviews were replaced by more comprehensive program reviews in which FPS regional staff with subject area expertise were to review each MegaCenter and report on concerns and best practices related to MegaCenter management, administration, technology, and equipment. In 2005, the Philadelphia MegaCenter was the first and only MegaCenter to undergo a program review. Program reviews were to be conducted annually at each MegaCenter, however, the MegaCenter managers suspended these reviews due to budgetary constraints.



## Objective 2: MegaCenters use various means to assess operations, continued

- Feedback on customer satisfaction—MegaCenter managers and supervisors use informal means for gathering information about the level of customer satisfaction. For example, they receive information from conversations with FPS region program staff and FPS police officers who, according to MegaCenter managers, do not hesitate to inform them of performance concerns. Managers also obtain feedback from federal building tenants and agencies during routine activities, such as when they update their emergency contact database, and from regional staff by attending regional staff meetings.
- Underwriters Laboratories (UL) control center certification—Although not an assessment by the MegaCenter staff themselves, the UL certification process involves feedback from UL inspectors about whether the MegaCenter meets technical and performance standards. UL inspectors complete initial inspections to certify the MegaCenters and conduct regular inspections once a center is certified. The Denver MegaCenter was UL certified in 2003 and has since had a subsequent inspection. The Philadelphia MegaCenter's initial UL inspection is scheduled to be completed in August 2006. Initial UL inspections at the remaining two MegaCenters have not been scheduled.
- Performance measurement—FPS has established performance measures for the MegaCenters.



Objective 2: MegaCenters use various means to  
assess operations, continued

- Figure 4: MegaCenter Supervisors Monitoring Center Operations



Source: FPS Denver MegaCenter



Objective 2: MegaCenter performance measures

- FPS has identified 11 performance measures for MegaCenter operations.
  - Distribute emergency notification reports (SPOT reports) within 30 minutes of notification.
  - Review problem alarm reports daily.
  - Obtain regular feedback about customer satisfaction from field operations.
  - Continuously review all SPOT reports and other outgoing information to ensure 100 percent accuracy.
  - Transcribe dictated offense and incident reports into database management system within 8 hours of receipt of the report.
  - Submit reviewed contractor billing reports and time sheets within 7 business days after the last day of the month.
  - Prepare and review contractor reports for quality assurance plan.
  - Maintain completely accurate (non-duplicative) case control numbers.
  - Meet UL guidelines and requirements continuously.<sup>5</sup>
  - Test failover of alarm, radio, and telephone systems weekly.<sup>6</sup>
  - Monitor calls and review recorded call content for adherence to standard procedures at least monthly.

<sup>5</sup>UL certifies centers that provide all elements of service required by UL's standards, including appropriate operator response to fire alarm signals and proper equipment inspection, testing, and maintenance.

<sup>6</sup>Failover is the capability to switch over automatically to a redundant or standby system in the event of a system failure. Each MegaCenter tests its ability to run its sister-center's operation in case that center has system failure.



## Objective 2: Attributes of successful performance measures

- The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 requires federal agencies to develop strategic plans, link them with outcome-oriented goals, and measure agency performance in achieving these goals. Measuring performance allows organizations to track the progress they are making toward their goals and gives managers critical information on which to base decisions for improving their progress.
- Organizations need to have performance measures that (1) demonstrate results, (2) are limited to the vital few, (3) cover multiple program priorities, and (4) provide useful information for decision making in order to track how their programs and activities can contribute to attaining the organization's goals and mission.
- We have previously reported on some of the most important attributes of successful performance measures. These attributes indicate that performance measures should:
  - (1) Be linked to an agency's mission and goals;
  - (2) Be clearly stated: a measure's name and definition are consistent with the methodology used to calculate it;
  - (3) Have quantifiable targets or other measurable values;
  - (4) Be reasonably free of significant bias or manipulation that would distort the accurate assessment of performance;
  - (5) Provide a reliable way to assess progress;
  - (6) Sufficiently cover the program's core activities;
  - (7) Have limited overlap with other measures;
  - (8) Have balance or not emphasize one or two priorities at the expense of others; and
  - (9) Address governmentwide priorities of quality, timeliness, efficiency, cost of service, and outcome.



## Objective 2: Assessing MegaCenter performance measures

- We assessed the 11 FPS MegaCenter performance measures against selected attributes of successful performance measures: linkage to performance goals and mission, clarity, and measurable targets. We also assessed whether collectively the 11 performance measures sufficiently cover the MegaCenters' core program activities and address governmentwide priorities of quality, timeliness, efficiency, cost of service, and outcome.
- Ten of the eleven MegaCenter performance measures were aligned with FPS's mission to protect and secure federally owned and leased properties and personnel and with the MegaCenter program's mission to provide high quality and standardized alarm monitoring, radio monitoring, and dispatch. For example, distributing emergency notification reports (SPOT reports) to federal agencies within 30 minutes helps protect federal personnel and properties by alerting federal managers of suspicious activities near their locations. We could find no link between timely review of contractor time sheets and billing statements and FPS's mission primarily because this measure seems to be related to administrative activities.
- MegaCenter performance measures lacked clarity and measurable targets. Although some of the measures seemed clearly stated, FPS could not provide information about how managers calculate any of the measures—a key component in the clarity attribute. Six of eleven performance measures have measurable targets—a key component for measuring performance. For example, the MegaCenter measure for testing the failover ability of alarm, radio, and telephone systems on a weekly basis is measurable because it has a quantifiable target but does not meet the clarity attribute because FPS could not describe the methodology for calculating this measure.



## Objective 2: Assessing MegaCenter performance measures

- Seven of the eleven MegaCenter performance measures relate to the MegaCenters' core activities. For example, daily review of problem alarm reports and weekly failover of alarm systems relate to the MegaCenters' alarm monitoring operation. Regular feedback on customer service and monthly review of operator calls cover aspects of the radio monitoring and dispatch functions. Other performance measures, like distributing emergency notification reports in 30 minutes, help fulfill other critical support functions. However, two of the performance measures—the timely review of contractor time sheets and preparing and reviewing contractor quality assurance plans—seem to relate to administrative activities and are not strictly related to MegaCenter core activities.
- The MegaCenter performance measures primarily address the governmentwide priorities of quality and timeliness. For example, transcribing reports within 8 hours and reviewing recorded calls to see if the operator followed standard procedures address aspects of service timeliness and quality, respectively. None of the measures relate to the other governmentwide priorities of efficiency, cost of service, and outcome.



Objective 2: FPS has established building security performance measures

- FPS has identified four performance measures to assess its efforts to reduce or mitigate building security risks.
- One of these measures—patrol and response time—assesses FPS’s ability to respond to calls for service within certain time limit goals. It measures the average elapsed time from when a MegaCener receives a law enforcement request (e.g., an alarm, telephone request from a building tenant, FPS officer initiated call) to the time an FPS officer arrives at the scene. In fiscal year 2005, FPS reported a national average response time of 47 minutes. Its goal is to reduce response time by 10 percent in fiscal year 2006.

**Table 4: FPS-wide Performance Measures for Facility Protection**

Performance measure	Purpose
Timely deployment of countermeasures	To compare actual deployment dates with planned deployment dates
Countermeasure functionality (e.g., surveillance cameras, X-ray machines)	To gauge whether those security countermeasures for which FPS is responsible are working as intended, once deployed
Patrol and response time	To assess FPS’s ability to respond to calls for service within certain time limit goals
Facility security index	To calculate FPS’s average success rate for the above three performance measures

Source: GAO, *Homeland Security: Guidance and Standards Are Needed for Measuring the Effectiveness of Agencies’ Facility Protection Efforts*, GAO-06-612 (Washington, D.C.: May 2006).



Objective 2: FPS response measure not  
linked to MegaCenters

- FPS does not link the MegaCenter performance measures to the FPS-wide performance measures, specifically, the FPS-wide patrol and response time measure.
- The MegaCenters are responsible for part of the patrol and response activity that is being measured because MegaCenter operators are in control of the alarm and call response and dispatch operations. However, although some time-related data is recorded in their records management system, the MegaCenters do not measure the timeliness of this activity and FPS has not developed a performance measure that would identify the MegaCenters' contribution toward meeting the FPS-wide measure.



Objective 3: Selected organizations' provision of MegaCenters' primary services

- The Park Police was the only selected organization that provides all three primary services offered by the MegaCenters. The remaining selected organizations provide one or two of these MegaCenter primary services.

**Table 5: MegaCenters' Primary Services Offered by Selected Organizations**

Organization	Alarm monitoring	Radio monitoring	Dispatch
Federal Protective Services	X	X	X
U.S. Customs and Border Protection		X	
U.S. Park Police	X	X	X
U.S. Postal Inspection Service	X	X	
Denver Police Department		X	X
Private security organizations	X		



### Objective 3: Selected organizations' provision of other services

- Selected organizations also offer other services the MegaCenters offer.
  - Many organizations record telephone and radio communications in case these communications need to be reviewed; officials from the associations stated that reviewing calls to ensure procedures are followed correctly is an important control center practice.
  - All public organizations provide information to officers based on inquiries to the FBI's National Crime Information Center among other databases.<sup>7</sup>
  - All private organizations provide access control services that allow them to track and restrict facility access.
  - One private organization monitors system conditions separately to distinguish between an intrusion, door propped open, tamper, or long access, which assists in determining the appropriate action to take.
- A few organizations offer services the MegaCenters do not.
  - Three private organizations provide audio and/or video monitoring services which allow operators to remotely listen and/or view live audio and/or video transmission from the secured site. Officials from two organizations reported that this type of surveillance technology minimizes the number of on-site guards required for their clients. In addition, this surveillance technology provides operators with additional intelligence information to help them decide what further actions to take.

<sup>7</sup>Like the MegaCenters, Customs and Border Protection, Postal Inspection Service, and Park Police also retrieve information for officers from the National Law Enforcement Telecommunication System and the Denver Police Department retrieves information for officers from the Colorado Crime Information Center database.



Objective 3: Workload and staffing of public organizations compared to MegaCenters

- Workloads and staffing vary by public organization. While Postal Inspection Service monitors more facilities than the MegaCenters, it does not dispatch officers. Park Police, an organization that does dispatch officers, has far fewer officers available to dispatch than the MegaCenters and, because the Park Police has a different purpose, it monitors far fewer facilities than the MegaCenters.

**Table 6: Workload Statistics of Selected Public Organizations' Centers**

Public organization	Center Purpose	Number of centers	Facilities monitored	Dispatchable personnel	Center staffing <sup>a</sup>
Federal Protective Service	Monitor alarm systems of federal facilities and dispatch FPS police officers and contract guards to these facilities, if necessary. Monitor the radios of officers and guards to ensure their safety and to provide information to officers.	4	8,328	7,856	240
U.S. Customs and Border Protection	Monitor radios nationwide for all customs investigations at ports to ensure officer safety and coordinate response, if necessary.	1	Not applicable	Not applicable	71
U.S. Park Police	Monitor alarms and dispatch Park Police officers and law enforcement rangers to protect national monuments and parks. Monitor officer radios to ensure officer safety and provide information to officers.	3	875 <sup>b</sup>	717	36
U.S. Postal Inspection Service	Monitor postal facilities' alarm systems and radio communication of Postal Inspection police and federal agents to ensure officer safety and to provide information to officers.	2	11,448	Not applicable	67
Denver Police Department	Provide emergency services to the city and county of Denver.	1	Not applicable	1,452	129 <sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>This includes both full-time federal employees and contract staff, where applicable.

<sup>b</sup>This is the approximate number of alarms monitored by Park Police's two centers in the District of Columbia and San Francisco. The New York control center does not monitor alarms.

<sup>c</sup>One hundred and twenty-nine is an approximation. Denver Police Department reported 131 personnel, 4 are part time.



Objective 3: Selected organizations'  
general organizational structure

- The selected organizations have organizational structures similar to the MegaCenters.
  - Like the MegaCenters, all five private organizations monitor alarms through centralized control centers.
    - Each of the five private organizations have between 2 to 5 national central control centers.
    - One private organization official stated that centralizing and consolidating monitoring services allows for easier staffing, better customer service, and higher quality technology.
  - Like the MegaCenters, all public and private organizations have backup ability, with the exception of Customs and Border Protection.<sup>8</sup>
    - Officials from the organizations and associations we interviewed cited the importance of center redundancy in the event of catastrophic failure at any one control center.

<sup>8</sup>Park Police's control center in the District of Columbia has backup capabilities for all three primary services. The centers in San Francisco and New York are able to backup their radio and call taking functions, however, the San Francisco center is not able to backup its alarm monitoring function.



### Objective 3: Selected organizations' work assignment structure

- Similar to the MegaCenters, most of selected organizations assign calls and alarms to a specific control center based on the geographic location of the call or alarm signal.
  - Some organizations reported that this type of work allocation is beneficial because it reduces stress for the operator and provides better customer service. For example, one private organization reported that its operators become familiar with both the people who call the control centers and their locations which allows them to provide better directions to responders.
- Postal Inspection Service and one private organization are able to allocate workload to their control centers based on demand and operator availability. For example, when an alarm signal or telephone call comes into Postal Inspection Service, its software decides which center should receive the signal or call based on center workload.
  - Both organizations reported efficiencies from this type of work allocation.
    - Postal Inspection Service reported a reduction in required center staff.
    - The private organization reported the ability to close some of its control centers during non-peak hours, reducing costs.
  - Both organizations attribute the ability to allocate work in this manner to more advanced technology.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Postal Inspection Service can only allocate work in this manner for its alarm monitoring and call taking service. Radio signals must be assigned to a specific center because the technology at the time Postal Inspection Service built its control centers was not yet developed to allow radio signals to be assigned to first available center.



Objective 3: Selected organizations' methods to assess service quality

- The selected organizations use a variety of methods to ensure centers are meeting their goals and providing quality services, many similar to the MegaCenters.

Table 7: Selected Organizations' Methods to Ensure Quality Service

Organization	Regular review of a sample of operators calls	Operator pay incentives based on performance	Volume and/or time measures	Regular and formal process for soliciting customer feedback
Federal Protective Service	X		X	
U.S. Customs and Border Protection <sup>a</sup>	X		X	
U.S. Park Police				
U.S. Postal Inspection Service	X		X	
Denver Police Department	X	X		
Private security organizations	X <sup>b</sup>	X	X <sup>b</sup>	X <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Customs and Border Protection officials reported that they are in the process of developing a formal customer survey tool.

<sup>b</sup>Indicates that at least one of the selected private security organizations used these methods.



Objective 3: Selected organizations' methods to  
assess service quality, continued

- Regular review of calls
  - Most officials from the associations we interviewed agreed that competent control centers have a quality assurance process that includes regular review of a random sample of calls to ensure that the operators asked the correct questions and provided the correct information when dispatching and to check the timelines and timing of responses. FPS MegaCenter supervisors monitor each of their operators calls on a monthly basis to ensure correct procedures are followed.
  
- Pay incentives
  - One private organization not only conducts call reviews but also ties pay incentives to its quality assessment program by linking employee call review evaluations to spot awards and bonuses. None of the federal agencies reviewed, including the MegaCenters, used these types of pay incentives.



Objective 3: Selected organizations' methods to  
assess service quality, continued

- Volume and time measurements
  - Examples of measurements are the amount of time it takes to answer a call, time taken to act on a call, and number of complaints from responding officers. Although the MegaCenters have volume and time measurements, they do not report the time it takes from receipt of alarm signal to officer dispatch. Some of the measures the MegaCenters use include the time elapsed between an officer calling in an incident and its entry into the records management system and the time it takes to send emergency notification reports to higher management. They also report volume statistics to their regions, such as the number of cases they have opened in a month.
  - Officials from Customs and Border Protection and the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies stated that many volume and time measurements cannot be used in law enforcement because timing can depend on circumstances. For example, the time it takes a Customs and Border Protection operator to clear a radio call would not be an appropriate measure because some of their functions are more tactical in nature— for example providing radio support in an undercover investigation— and cannot accurately be measured with time and volume statistics only.



Objective 3: Selected organizations' methods to  
assess service quality, continued

- Customer satisfaction
  - Two private organizations regularly and formally survey their customers to find out if operators were pleasant, delivered timely service, and seemed to be well trained and informed.
  - Other organizations, like MegaCenters, use a more informal process to gauge customer satisfaction. To formalize its customer feedback, the Suitland MegaCenter developed a survey to gauge officer satisfaction, however, it is waiting for approval to use it.
    - Customs and Border Protection has hired a private consultant to help them develop a customer satisfaction survey and believe its use, in conjunction with volume statistics, will provide a more meaningful measure of their service quality.



Objective 3: Selected organizations' methods to  
assess service quality, continued

- Performance measures
  - One private organization and the Postal Inspection Service not only perform assessment activities but also have established measurable performance goals for their control centers. Examples of the private organization's goals are: resolution of 90 percent of high priority events within 60 seconds and resolution of 85 percent of inbound and technical assistance specialist calls within 18 seconds.
  - Postal Inspection Service has begun to establish volume and time measurement goals, such as a 25 percent reduction in the number of complaints in which standard operating procedures were not followed and a 10 percent reduction in the time it takes to answer radio calls. They intend to revise their goals in fiscal year 2007 once they have actual experience against which to set a benchmark.
  - The MegaCenters have created performance measures, however, they lack some attributes of successful performance measures, such as measurable targets.



### Objective 3: Selected organizations use of a CAD system

- The MegaCenters perform dispatch and incident management functions manually while Denver Police Department uses a CAD system to perform these functions and the Postal Inspection Service uses a CAD system to track officer locations and perform incident management functions. The Park Police's San Francisco center also uses a CAD system with limited capabilities, and Park Police has a plan in place to purchase and upgrade a system for its three centers.
- MegaCenter operators keep track of officers on duty and their locations by hand or by using an Excel spreadsheet, and when they dispatch an officer to a federal building they must enter the address location into the database. In comparison, when a Postal Inspection Service operator tracks an officer to a building, the CAD system automatically populates the address field and the system shows all contact information for that building. Without a CAD system, the operators spend more time retrieving information from different sources and entering data, such as client contact information.
- CAD systems automate dispatch and incident management functions and allow for more efficient handling of incidents. Typical CAD system functions include management of call routing and prioritization, dispatching, and response procedures. For example, a CAD system can decide which control center a call should go to based on workload, prioritize the call for the operator, and automatically display to the operator the actions to take. CAD systems record times of incidents, locations, and corresponding actions by dispatchers and officers which allows for analysis to be conducted to determine, for example, response times, workload, the types of incidents requiring response, and resource allocation needs.



Objective 3: Selected organizations use of  
a CAD system, continued

- Figure 5: Left: Postal Inspection Service Operators Using a CAD System to Track Officer Locations, Right: Postal Inspection Service's Network Server Room



Source: U.S. Postal Inspection Service's National Law Enforcement Control Center, Dulles, VA.



Objective 3: Selected organizations use of  
a CAD system, continued

- Selected organizations and associations stated that CAD systems are beneficial for dispatching services by allowing for faster operator response, automatic recording of operator actions enabling easier performance analysis, and automatic operator access to standard operating procedures and response prioritization. For example, when a signal comes into a Postal Inspection Service control center, the CAD system automatically retrieves and displays the response actions for the operator to follow.
- FPS has repeatedly recognized the need for a CAD system. In 1993, the Sandia study of FPS's former control centers recommended that the centers have a CAD system for the most effective and time efficient dispatch operations while using a minimum center personnel structure. A 2003 DHS MegaCenter review also stated that the MegaCenters needed a CAD system. In January 2006, FPS issued a request for information for a CAD system. No funding has been allocated in fiscal year 2006 for the MegaCenters to purchase a CAD system.



Objective 3: Best practices: technology  
planning

- Our guide on IT investment decision-making— based on best practices in the public and private sectors— stresses that part of achieving maximum benefits from an IT project requires that decisions be made on a regular basis about the status of the project. To make these decisions, senior managers need assessments of the project’s impact on mission performance and future prospects for the project.
- Senior managers should regularly question whether (1) the current system meets organizational needs, (2) the system should be modified to better meet these needs, (3) a new system is needed to best meet these needs, or (4) the needs could best be met by outsourcing the work. Included in the regular review should be costs for operation and maintenance of the project, such as hardware upgrades, system software changes, and ongoing user training. Successful IT management requires that a plan be developed for the continued support and operation of every IT project.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup>GAO, *Assessing Risks and Returns: A Guide for Evaluating Federal Agencies’ IT Investment Decision-making*, GAO/AIMD-10.1.13 (Washington, D.C.: February 1997).



## Objective 3: FPS technology planning

- While the MegaCenters have assessed their technology on several occasions and have determined that some refreshment is needed, no funding has been allocated by FPS for this use.
  - When the MegaCenters were established, FPS intended scheduled replacement of their technical systems after 5 years, but this timeline has passed. In addition, a 2003 DHS MegaCenter review found that there were various states of technologies in systems across centers and proposed planning for life cycle equipment replacement. However, according to FPS officials, no technology replacement program has been established, and equipment is replaced on a per MegaCenter, as-needed basis.
  - A 2005 program review of the Philadelphia MegaCenter found that no strategic plan had been established to guide and lead the MegaCenters into the future in terms of technology and equipment. The review suggested that a national team be assembled to focus on the MegaCenters' communications and technology needs. Loss of IT positions at the MegaCenters has prevented the MegaCenter branch chief from creating this national team. However, FPS's IT program manager conducts weekly teleconferences to discuss IT issues in the MegaCenters, which MegaCenter IT staff attend. In addition, the MegaCenter branch chief has developed a radio coverage plan— his main technology priority for the MegaCenters— which outlines plans to acquire technology systems that will ensure the MegaCenters can receive radio signals for all areas in the regions.<sup>11</sup> There has been no funding to implement this plan.

<sup>11</sup>Currently there are some areas where FPS police officers' and contract guards' radios cannot transmit signals to the MegaCenters preventing the MegaCenter operators from being able to monitor the radios.



Objective 3: FPS technology planning,  
continued

- As part of the budget justification process, FPS has submitted the required analysis and requested funding for a technology upgrade project for each budget year from 2003 through 2006.<sup>12</sup> FPS's proposed project is to maintain, consolidate, standardize, and enhance current and future FPS systems and integrate it with DHS systems. Included in the request for each year is an Operations Reporting and Information Network (ORION) system to be used at the MegaCenters that would provide enhanced incident capture and tracking, officer tracking, and officer safety features and includes a CAD system.
- Although FPS has developed this investment plan, no funds have been allocated for ORION or any other MegaCenter technology improvements. An FPS official stated that because of limited funding, the MegaCenters are not investing in technology, and the only money being spent on MegaCenter technology is for maintenance so they can maintain current operations. Another official reported that under GSA, FPS was given funds for technology investment but since moving to DHS, FPS has not received these extra funds and must take money from its operating budget to fund technology purchases.

<sup>12</sup>Each year agencies submit to the Office of Management and Budget a Capital Asset Plan and Business Case to justify each request for a major IT investment.

# Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland  
Security**

September 6, 2006

Mr. Mathew J. Scire  
Acting Director  
Physical Infrastructure Issues  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Scire:

RE: Draft Report GAO-07-18, Homeland Security: Federal Protective Service  
Could Better Measure the Performance of Its Control Centers  
(GAO Job Code 543151)

The Department of Homeland Security appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report referenced above. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommends that the Director of the Federal Protective Service (1) establish Mega Center performance measures that meet the attributes of successful performance measures that GAO has identified, and (2) develop a performance measure for the Mega Centers that is directly linked to the Federal Protective Service-wide response time measure and covers the scope of Mega Center operations. The report also suggests that Mega Centers would benefit from computer-aided dispatch system capabilities. The findings are specific to program operations.

We agree in principle that it is important that Federal Protective Service (FPS) officials identify and develop performance measures to quantify and gauge the success of Mega Center operations. Towards that end, FPS officials, working within U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), have undertaken a comprehensive review of the Mega Centers to identify not only ways in which performance can be better measured, but also methods by which efficiencies can be achieved, processes can be improved, and capabilities can be leveraged. FPS personnel can generate and track the kind of information necessary to assess performance through this broad approach.

The draft report also suggests that Mega Centers would benefit from computer-aided dispatch system capabilities. The U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Chief Information Officer (CIO) currently is assessing Mega Center technology requirements. We recognize that there have been several studies and evaluations of Mega Center technology that have identified the need for technology upgrades; however, ICE officials anticipate that the current assessment will have a meaningful impact on FPS technology capabilities. The CIO, reporting directly to the ICE Assistant Secretary on the progress

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**Appendix II**  
**Comments from the Department of Homeland**  
**Security**

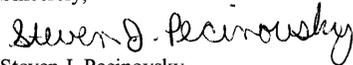
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and findings of the study, is reviewing radio infrastructure, voice and data circuit infrastructure, Mega Centers as an ICE asset, and the FPS information technology portfolio.

Technical comments have been provided under separate cover.

Sincerely,



Steven J. Pecinovsky

Director

Departmental GAO/OIG Liaison Office

MMcP

# GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

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## Staff Acknowledgments

Other key contributors to this report were Gerald P. Barnes, Assistant Director; Deirdre Brown; Bess Eisenstadt; Colin Fallon; Brandon Haller; Richard Hung; Alex Lawrence; Gail Marnik; and Josh Ormand.

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