



Highlights of [GAO-12-526T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Communications, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

From fiscal years 2002 through 2011, the federal government appropriated over \$37 billion to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) preparedness grant programs to enhance the capabilities of state and local governments to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks. DHS allocated \$20.3 billion of this funding to grant recipients through four of the largest preparedness grant programs—the State Homeland Security Program, the Urban Areas Security Initiative, the Port Security Grant Program, and the Transit Security Grant Program. The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2006 requires the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to develop a national preparedness system and assess preparedness capabilities—capabilities needed to respond effectively to disasters. FEMA could then use such a system to help it prioritize grant funding. This testimony addresses the extent to which DHS and FEMA have made progress in managing preparedness grants and measuring preparedness by assessing capabilities and addressing related challenges. GAO's comments are based on products issued from April 2002 through February 2012 and selected updates conducted in March 2012.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has made recommendations to DHS and FEMA in prior reports to strengthen their management of preparedness grants and enhance their assessment of national preparedness capabilities. DHS and FEMA concurred and have actions underway to address them.

View [GAO-12-526T](#). For more information, contact William O. Jenkins, Jr. at (202) 512-8777 or jenkinswo@gao.gov.

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FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY

Continuing Challenges Impede Progress in Managing Preparedness Grants and Assessing National Capabilities

What GAO Found

DHS and FEMA have taken actions with the goal of enhancing management of preparedness grants, but better project information and coordination could help FEMA identify and mitigate the risk of unnecessary duplication among grant applications. Specifically, DHS and FEMA have taken actions to streamline the application and award processes and have enhanced their use of risk management for allocating grants. For example, in November 2011, GAO reported that DHS modified its risk assessment model for the Port Security Grant Program by recognizing that different ports have different vulnerability levels. However, in February 2012, GAO reported that FEMA made award decisions for four of its grant programs—the State Homeland Security Grant Program, the Urban Area Security Initiative, the Port Security Grant Program, and the Transit Security Grant Program—with differing levels of information, which contributed to the risk of funding unnecessarily duplicative projects. GAO also reported that FEMA did not have a process to coordinate application reviews across the four grant programs. Rather, grant applications were reviewed separately by program and were not compared across each other to determine where possible unnecessary duplication may occur. Thus, GAO recommended that (1) FEMA collect project information with the level of detail needed to better position the agency to identify any potential unnecessary duplication within and across the four grant programs, weighing any additional costs of collecting this data and (2) explore opportunities to enhance FEMA's internal coordination and administration of the programs to identify and mitigate the potential for any unnecessary duplication. DHS agreed and identified planned actions to improve visibility and coordination across programs and projects. FEMA has proposed consolidating the majority of its various preparedness grant programs into a single, comprehensive preparedness grant program called the National Preparedness Grant Program (NPGP) in fiscal year 2013; however, this may create new challenges. For example, allocations under the NPGP would rely heavily on a state's risk assessment, but grantees have not yet received guidance on how to conduct the risk assessment process. FEMA has established a website to solicit input from stakeholders on how best to implement the program.

DHS and FEMA have had difficulty implementing longstanding plans and overcoming challenges in assessing capabilities, such as determining how to validate and aggregate data from federal, state, local, and tribal governments. For example, DHS first developed plans in 2004 to measure preparedness by assessing capabilities, but these efforts have been repeatedly delayed. In March 2011, GAO reported that FEMA's efforts to develop and implement a comprehensive, measurable, national preparedness assessment of capability and gaps were not yet complete and suggested that Congress consider limiting preparedness grant funding until FEMA completes a national preparedness assessment of capability gaps based on tiered, capability-specific performance objectives to enable prioritization of grant funding. In April 2011, Congress passed the fiscal year 2011 appropriations act for DHS that reduced funding for FEMA preparedness grants by \$875 million from the amount requested in the President's fiscal year 2011 budget. For fiscal year 2012, Congress appropriated \$1.28 billion less than requested in the President's budget.