



Highlights of [GAO-13-370T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security began operations nearly 10 years ago on March 1, 2003. Around that time, GAO designated implementing and transforming DHS as high risk because DHS had to transform 22 agencies—several with major management challenges—into one department. Further, failure to effectively address DHS's management and mission risks could have serious consequences for U.S. national and economic security. Since 2003, GAO has evaluated numerous departmental programs and operations and issued over 1,300 products in such areas as border security and immigration, transportation security, and emergency management, among others.

This testimony addresses (1) DHS's progress implementing and strengthening its mission functions, and (2) crosscutting issues that have affected the department's implementation efforts. This testimony is based on products GAO has issued assessing DHS's progress in implementing its homeland security missions and work remaining.

What GAO Recommends

While this testimony contains no new recommendations, GAO has previously made about 1,800 recommendations to DHS designed to strengthen its programs and operations. DHS has addressed more than 60 percent of them, has efforts underway to address others, and has taken additional action to strengthen the department.

View [GAO-13-370T](#). For more information, contact Cathleen A. Berrick, 202-512-3404, berrickc@gao.gov

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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Progress Made and Work Remaining after Nearly 10 Years in Operation

What GAO Found

Since the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began operations in 2003, it has implemented key homeland security operations and achieved important goals and milestones in many areas to create and strengthen a foundation to reach its potential. As it continues to mature, however, more work remains for DHS to address gaps and weaknesses in its current operational and implementation efforts, and to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of those efforts.

In its assessment of DHS's progress and challenges 10 years after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, as well as its more recent work, GAO reported that DHS had, among other things, developed strategic and operational plans across its range of missions; established new, or expanded existing, offices and programs; and developed and issued policies, procedures, and regulations to govern its homeland security operations. However, GAO also identified that challenges remained for DHS to address across its missions. Examples of progress made and work remaining include the following:

Aviation security. DHS developed and implemented Secure Flight, a program through which the federal government now prescreens all passengers on all commercial flights to, from, and within the United States. However, DHS did not validate the science supporting its behavior detection program before deploying behavior detection officers at airports, including determining whether such techniques could be successfully used to detect threats.

Border security/immigration enforcement. DHS reported data indicating it had met its goal to secure the land border because of a decrease in apprehensions, attributed in part to changes in the U.S. economy and achievement of DHS strategic objectives. However, DHS has not developed a process to identify and analyze program risks, such as a process to evaluate prior and suspected cases of fraud, in its Student and Exchange Visitor Program, a program intended to, among other things, ensure that foreign students studying in the United States comply with the terms of their admission into the country.

Emergency preparedness and response. DHS issued the National Response Framework, which outlines disaster response guiding principles. However, GAO reported that DHS could reduce the costs to the federal government related to major disasters declared by the President by updating the principal indicator on which disaster funding decisions are based and better measuring a state's capacity to respond without federal assistance.

GAO has identified three key themes—leading and coordinating the homeland security enterprise, implementing and integrating management functions for results, and strategically managing risks and assessing homeland security efforts—that DHS needs to address from a departmentwide perspective to effectively and efficiently position the department for the future. DHS has made progress in all three areas by, among other things, providing leadership and coordination. However, DHS has continued to face challenges in all of these areas. For example, GAO reported that improving research and development could help DHS reduce, among other things, cost overruns and performance shortfalls by reducing inefficiencies and costs for homeland security.