

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-766T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate.

Why GAO Did This Study

Conducting R&D on technologies for detecting, preventing, and mitigating terrorist threats is vital to enhancing the security of the nation. Since its creation, DHS has spent billions of dollars researching and developing technologies used to support its missions including securing the border, detecting nuclear devices, and screening airline passengers and baggage for explosives, among others. Within DHS, S&T conducts and is responsible for coordinating R&D across the department, but other components, such as the Coast Guard and DNDO, also conduct R&D to support their respective missions.

This statement discusses (1) how much DHS invests in R&D and the extent to which DHS has policies and guidance for defining R&D and overseeing R&D resources and efforts across the department, and (2) the extent to which R&D is coordinated within DHS to prevent overlap, fragmentation, or unnecessary duplication. This statement is based on GAO's September 2012 report on DHS R&D efforts, along with selected updates conducted in June 2013 and July 2013. To conduct the selected updates, GAO interviewed agency officials on the status of implementing GAO's recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

In its September 2012 report, GAO recommended that DHS develop policies and guidance for defining, reporting and coordinating R&D activities across the department; and that DHS establish a mechanism to track R&D projects. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendations and has actions underway to address them.

View [GAO-13-766T](#). For more information, contact Dave Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or maurerd@gao.gov.

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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Oversight and Coordination of Research and Development Efforts Could Be Strengthened

What GAO Found

In September 2012, GAO reported that the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) does not know the total amount its components invest in research and development (R&D) and does not have policies and guidance for defining R&D and overseeing R&D resources across the department. According to DHS, its Science & Technology Directorate (S&T), Domestic Nuclear Detection Office (DNDO), and U. S. Coast Guard (Coast Guard) are the only components that conduct R&D, and GAO found that these are the only components that report budget authority, obligations, or outlays for R&D activities to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) as part of the budget process. However, GAO identified an additional \$255 million in R&D obligations made by other DHS components. According to DHS, it is difficult to identify all R&D investments across the department because DHS does not have a department wide policy defining R&D or guidance directing components how to report all R&D spending and activities. As a result, it is difficult for DHS to oversee components' R&D efforts and align them with agency wide R&D goals and priorities. GAO recommended that DHS develop specific policies and guidance to assist DHS components in better understanding how to report R&D activities, and better position DHS to determine how much the agency invests in R&D to effectively oversee these investments. DHS concurred with the recommendation and reported that it planned to evaluate the most effective path to guide R&D across the department. GAO will continue to monitor DHS's efforts to develop its approach for defining and overseeing R&D at the department.

In September 2012, GAO also reported that S&T has taken some steps to coordinate R&D efforts across DHS, but the department's R&D efforts are fragmented and overlapping, which increases the risk of unnecessary duplication. R&D at DHS is inherently fragmented because S&T, the Coast Guard, and DNDO were each given R&D responsibilities in law, and other DHS components may pursue and conduct their own R&D efforts as long as those activities are coordinated through S&T. S&T uses various mechanisms to coordinate its R&D efforts including component liaisons, component R&D agreements, joint R&D strategies, and integrated R&D product teams composed of S&T and component officials. However, GAO identified 35 instances of overlap among contracts that DHS components awarded for R&D projects. While GAO did not identify instances of unnecessary duplication among these contracts, DHS has not developed a policy defining who is responsible for coordinating R&D and what processes should be used to coordinate it, and does not have mechanisms to track all R&D activities at DHS that could help prevent overlap, fragmentation, or unnecessary duplication. GAO recommended that DHS develop a policy defining the roles and responsibilities for coordinating R&D, and establish a mechanism to track all R&D projects to help DHS mitigate existing fragmentation and overlap, and reduce the risk of unnecessary duplication. DHS concurred with the recommendation and reported that S&T is conducting portfolio reviews across the agency, as required by a fiscal year 2013 appropriation requirement, aimed at coordinating R&D activities. We will continue to monitor DHS's efforts to develop a policy to better coordinate and track R&D activities at the department.