

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-541T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Each year, DHS invests billions of dollars in its major acquisition programs to help execute its many critical missions. In fiscal year 2014 alone, DHS planned to spend approximately \$10.7 billion on these acquisition programs, and the department expects it will ultimately invest more than \$200 billion in them. DHS's acquisition policy generally reflects key program management practices. However, due to shortfalls in executing the policy, GAO has highlighted DHS acquisition management issues on its high-risk list and made numerous recommendations to improve acquisition management practices.

This statement discusses (1) the health of 22 DHS major acquisition programs and (2) the underlying systems in place to oversee and manage such programs.

This statement is based on two prior GAO reports on DHS acquisition management issued in April and March 2015, respectively ([GAO-15-171SP](#) and [GAO-15-292](#)).

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making any new recommendations in this statement. GAO has made numerous prior recommendations to DHS, such as obtaining department-level approval for key acquisition documents, more thoroughly documenting the results of operational testing, taking steps to improve the accuracy of program data, and producing cost estimates for operational programs. DHS concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-15-541T](#). For more information, contact Michele Mackin at (202) 512-4841 or mackinm@gao.gov.

April 22, 2015

HOMELAND SECURITY ACQUISITIONS

Addressing Gaps in Oversight and Information is Key to Improving Program Outcomes

What GAO Found

In its April 2015 report, GAO reviewed 22 major programs at the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and found that two of them were on track to meet schedule and cost parameters—that is, the initial schedules and cost estimates DHS leadership approved after the department revised its acquisition policy in November 2008. Of note, GAO was unable to assess six programs—four of which are in Customs and Border Protection—because DHS leadership had not yet approved baselines establishing their schedules and cost estimates as required by DHS policy. The remaining 14 programs had experienced schedule slips, or schedule slips and cost growth. On average, these program milestones slipped more than three-and-a-half years, and their life-cycle cost estimates increased by \$9.7 billion, or 18 percent.

GAO Assessment of 22 Major DHS Acquisition Programs

Total number of programs GAO assessed	Programs on track to meet cost and schedule parameters	Programs with schedule slips	Programs with schedule slips and cost growth	Programs that lacked approved schedules and cost estimates
22	2	7	7	6

Source: GAO analysis of DHS documentation and data. | GAO-15-541T

GAO reported in 2012 that three key factors increase the likelihood that schedules will slip and costs will grow:

- shortfalls in program office staffing,
- gaps between needed and expected funding for programs, and
- changes to program requirements.

GAO found that these issues remain prevalent department-wide.

In March 2015, GAO reported that DHS has taken steps to improve oversight of major acquisition programs, such as defining the role of the senior acquisition official within each component and clearly defining roles and responsibilities of headquarters staff who carry out day-to-day oversight of these programs. Despite these efforts, DHS lacks key information necessary to manage its programs. For example, GAO found ambiguity across DHS testing assessments in that they did not always clearly identify whether the systems tested met all of their key performance parameters (that is, the capability or system attributes that are required to successfully meet the DHS mission). In addition, DHS's official system for acquisition program reporting—which feeds into required congressional reports—is hampered by data problems, such as inaccurate life-cycle cost estimates. As a result, the most recent data provided to DHS and congressional decision makers for oversight, through the fiscal year 2014 Comprehensive Acquisition Status Report, were not consistently accurate and up-to-date. Finally, DHS does not have information on operations and maintenance costs for 42 operational programs for which the normal documentation requirements were waived in 2013. GAO found that only one of these 42 programs has an approved life-cycle cost estimate. Operations and maintenance costs—which can account for more than 80 percent of program life-cycle costs—could run in the billions of dollars for these 42 programs.