



Highlights of [GAO-07-822T](#), a report to Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment, Homeland Security Committee, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is responsible for coordinating the federal government's homeland security communications with all levels of government, the private sector, and the public. In support of its mission, the department has deployed a Web-based information-sharing application—the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN)—and operates at least 11 homeland security networks. The department reported that in fiscal years 2005 and 2006, these investments cost \$611.8 million to develop, operate, and maintain.

In view of the significance of information sharing for protecting homeland security, GAO was asked to testify on the department's efforts to coordinate its development and use of HSIN with two key state and local initiatives under the Regional Information Sharing Systems—a nationwide information-sharing program operated and managed by state and local officials.

This testimony is based on a recent GAO report that addresses, among other things, DHS's homeland security networks and HSIN. In performing the work for that report, GAO analyzed documentation on HSIN and state and local initiatives, compared it against the requirements of the Homeland Security Act and federal guidance and best practices, and interviewed DHS officials and state and local officials.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-822T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Homeland Security Information Network Needs to Be Better Coordinated with Key State and Local Initiatives

What GAO Found

In developing HSIN, its key homeland security information-sharing application, DHS did not work effectively with two key Regional Information Sharing Systems program initiatives. This program, which is operated and managed by state and local officials nationwide, provides services to law enforcement, emergency responders, and other public safety officials. However, DHS did not coordinate with the program to fully develop joint strategies and policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries, which are key practices for effective coordination and collaboration and a means to enhance information sharing and avoid duplication of effort. For example, DHS did not engage the program in ongoing dialogue to determine how resources could be leveraged to meet mutual needs.

A major factor contributing to this limited coordination was that the department rushed to deploy HSIN after the events of September 11, 2001. In its haste, it did not develop a comprehensive inventory of key state and local information-sharing initiatives, and it did not achieve a full understanding of the relevance of the Regional Information Sharing Systems program to homeland security information sharing.

As a result, DHS faces the risk that effective information sharing is not occurring and that HSIN may be duplicating state and local capabilities. Specifically, both HSIN and one of the Regional Information Sharing Systems initiatives target similar user groups, such as emergency management agencies, and all have similar features, such as electronic bulletin boards, "chat" tools, and document libraries.

The department has efforts planned and under way to improve coordination and collaboration, including developing an integration strategy to allow other applications and networks to connect with HSIN, so that organizations can continue to use their preferred information-sharing applications and networks. In addition, it has agreed to implement recommendations made by GAO to take specific steps to (1) improve coordination, including developing a comprehensive inventory of state and local initiatives, and (2) ensure that similar coordination and duplication issues do not arise with other federal homeland security networks, systems, and applications. Until DHS completes these efforts, including developing an inventory of key state and local initiatives and fully implementing and institutionalizing key practices for effective coordination and collaboration, the department will continue to be at risk that information is not being effectively shared and that the department is duplicating state and local capabilities.