

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-402T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives.

## Why GAO Did This Study

Thousands of facilities across the United States contain hazardous chemicals that could be used by terrorists to inflict mass casualties or harm surrounding populations. In accordance with the DHS Appropriations Act, 2007, DHS established the CFATS program to, among other things, identify and assess the security risk posed by chemical facilities. DHS inspects high-risk facilities after it approves facility security plans to ensure that the facilities are implementing required security measures and procedures.

This statement summarizes progress and challenges related to DHS's CFATS program management. This statement is based on prior products GAO issued from July 2012 through August 2018, along with updates as of September 2018 on actions DHS has taken to address GAO's prior recommendations. To conduct the prior work, GAO reviewed relevant laws, regulations, and DHS policies for administering the CFATS program; how DHS assesses risk; and data on high-risk chemical facilities. GAO also interviewed DHS officials and relevant stakeholders.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO has made various recommendations to strengthen DHS's management of the CFATS program, with which DHS has generally agreed. DHS has implemented or described planned actions to address these recommendations.

View [GAO-19-402T](#). For more information, contact Nathan Anderson at (202) 512-3841 or [andersonn@gao.gov](mailto:andersonn@gao.gov).

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## CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION

### Progress and Challenges in DHS's Management of Its Chemical Facility Security Program

#### What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has made progress addressing challenges that GAO's past work identified to managing the Chemical Facility Anti-Terrorism Standards (CFATS) program. The following summarizes progress made and challenges remaining in key aspects of the program.

**Identifying high-risk chemical facilities.** In July 2015, GAO reported that DHS used self-reported and unverified data to determine the risk of facilities holding toxic chemicals that could threaten surrounding communities if released. GAO recommended that DHS should better verify the accuracy of facility-reported data. DHS implemented this recommendation by revising its methodology so it now calculates the risk of toxic release, rather than relying on facilities to do so.

**Assessing risk and prioritizing facilities.** In April 2013, GAO reported weaknesses in multiple aspects of DHS's risk assessment and prioritization approach. To improve this process, GAO recommended that DHS enhance its risk assessment approach to incorporate all elements of risk and conduct a peer review after doing so. DHS implemented both recommendations by revising the CFATS risk assessment methodology to include threat, vulnerability, and consequence to better cover the range of security issues, and conducting peer reviews and technical reviews to verify and validate the CFATS program's new risk assessment approach.

**Reviewing and approving facility site security plans.** DHS is to review facility security plans to ensure their security measures meet DHS standards. In April 2013, GAO reported a 7- to 9-year backlog for these reviews. In July 2015, GAO reported that DHS had made substantial progress in addressing the backlog—estimating that it could take between 9 and 12 months for DHS to review and approve security plans for the approximately 900 remaining facilities. DHS has since taken additional action to expedite these activities and has eliminated this backlog.

**Inspecting facilities and ensuring compliance.** In July 2015, GAO found that nearly half of the facilities DHS had inspected were not fully compliant with their approved security plans and that DHS did not have documented procedures for managing facilities' compliance. GAO recommended that DHS document procedures for managing compliance. DHS revised CFATS procedures that, as of February 2019, GAO is reviewing to determine if they sufficiently address the recommendation.

**Conducting stakeholder and first responder outreach.** In August 2018, GAO reported that DHS shares some CFATS information with first responders and emergency planners but these stakeholders may not have all of the information they need to minimize the risk of injury or death when responding to incidents at high-risk facilities. GAO recommended that DHS should, among other things, take actions to explore opportunities to improve information-sharing with first responders and emergency planners. DHS concurred with this recommendation and reported in September 2018 that it is conducting additional outreach and taking other actions to implement it.