

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105887](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

Climate change and increasingly frequent and extreme weather events have caused a surge in global natural disasters over the past 50 years, according to the World Meteorological Organization. State has concluded that natural hazards pose a threat to the missions and personnel at over 290 U.S. overseas posts valued at about \$70 billion. GAO was asked to review State's efforts to address natural hazard risks to its facilities, including risks exacerbated by climate change, and the challenges associated with these efforts.

This report examines: (1) steps State has taken to enhance natural hazard resilience of its facilities overseas, (2) State's efforts to identify and incorporate natural hazard risk into its resilience plans, and (3) the extent to which State's resources align with planned resilience efforts. GAO reviewed State documents, natural hazard risk assessment data, and OBO funding or budget information from 2019 through 2024. GAO also interviewed State officials and staff at four posts selected for their high exposure to natural hazards.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of State ensure that OBO adjust its Climate Security and Resilience program plans to reflect department decisions on program staffing levels, as appropriate. State concurred with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-23-105887](#). For more information, contact Nagla'a El-Hodiri at (202) 512-7279 or [elhodirin@gao.gov](mailto:elhodirin@gao.gov) or Catina Latham at (312) 220-7628 or [lathamc@gao.gov](mailto:lathamc@gao.gov).

June 2023

## OVERSEAS REAL PROPERTY

### State Has Not Aligned Natural Hazard Resilience Plans to Staffing Levels

## What GAO Found

The Department of State's Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations (OBO) has taken steps to address natural hazard risks at overseas facilities by incorporating structural improvements and analyzing and evaluating ongoing risks. OBO's construction, repair, and leasing processes help enhance the natural hazard resilience of its overseas facilities. For example, OBO's construction design standards incorporate resilience considerations from industry-recognized building codes. In addition, OBO's prioritization process for repair projects includes natural hazard risks among selection criteria. GAO also found that OBO updated some design standards and construction processes to integrate new information on natural hazards, such as flooding (see figure).

Flooding of the US. Embassy in Manila, Philippines in August 2022



Source: Department of State. | GAO-23-105887

In 2020, OBO created the Climate Security and Resilience program to help identify current and projected natural hazard risks at U.S. embassies and consulates. OBO is also taking steps to integrate natural hazard risk and resilience into its policies and processes for managing its assets.

According to OBO, the Climate Security and Resilience program does not have adequate staff to complete all planned program efforts in support of State's climate resilience priorities. A workforce analysis prepared by OBO's contractor recommended that OBO increase program staffing from about four to 11 positions to meet the expected demands of the program, such as helping posts identify recommended hazard resilience projects. State requested additional staff for OBO as part of the fiscal year 2024 budget process. However, OBO has yet to determine how it will allocate staff across its competing programs and priorities. By aligning program plans with the staffing level State provides, State and OBO can more clearly establish how the program can support State's climate resilience goals for its overseas properties.