



Highlights of [GAO-04-1009](#), a report to Chairman, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

As requested, GAO reviewed coordination practices in various metropolitan areas to find regional programs with lessons learned that could be applied in the National Capital Region (NCR) and elsewhere. We addressed the following questions:

- (1) In selected metropolitan areas, what factors enhance regional coordination?
- (2) What features of federal programs enhance regional emergency preparedness coordination?
- (3) How does regional coordination for emergency preparedness in the NCR incorporate features from other areas and federal programs?

For detailed analysis, we selected Dallas, Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and Tampa-St. Petersburg—considered by DHS to be high-threat urban areas because of their population and critical infrastructure, among other factors. We also analyzed regional coordination in the planning and implementation of transportation and environmental programs because of their history of requiring such collaboration.

DHS and the District of Columbia's Deputy Mayor/City Administrator generally agreed with our report regarding the characteristics of regional coordination and that the NCR's Urban Area Security Initiative governance structure was relatively advanced.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-1009.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Patricia A. Dalton at (202) 512-6806 or daltonp@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Effective Regional Coordination Can Enhance Emergency Preparedness

What GAO Found

GAO's analysis of federal program documents and plans, and interviews with federal, state, and local officials in six metropolitan areas revealed several factors that characterize effective regional coordination of federally supported efforts. Regional coordination efforts are enhanced by the presence of a collaborative regional organization that includes representation from many different jurisdictions and different disciplines. Also, when regional civic and political traditions foster interjurisdictional coordination, flexibility in the membership and geographic area of the regional organization can enhance collaborative activities. In addition, a comprehensive strategic plan with measurable goals and objectives helps focus resources and efforts to address problems. Finally, funding regional organizations provides incentives for their collaborative planning activities.

The federal government can provide support for regional coordination. In particular, through its grant design and requirements, it encourages structures and practices associated with effective regional efforts. For example, federal transportation law requires the existence of metropolitan planning organizations (MPO) before transportation funds can be awarded. Some programs have recognized the importance of flexibility by allowing local jurisdictions to organize themselves in ways consistent with their regional environment. For example, the DHS' Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant program allowed three San Francisco Bay programs to pool some of their grant resources to establish a regionwide UASI effort. Moreover, some federal grants require regional organizations to prepare plans that guide funding decisions. Transportation law, for example, requires MPOs to prepare transportation improvement plans as a condition for awards. Finally, federal financial support can facilitate coordination activities. Several programs, including the MPO program, provide such support.

The characteristics of effective regional coordination we identified are applicable to the NCR's efforts to coordinate emergency preparedness. If implemented as planned and as observed in its early stage, the NCR's UASI program would include a collaborative regional organization. However, as we reported in May 2004, the NCR did not include a full array of homeland security grants in its planning. The NCR's UASI program plans to address those issues by identifying non-UASI funding sources and collecting information about the funding allocations, expenditures, and purposes, as well as data on spending by NCR jurisdiction. DHS and UASI officials believe these data will enable program managers to avoid duplication of expenditures and to better utilize program funds.

Regional approaches are changing quickly, and the nation is still in the early stages of building regional institutions across the country to deal with homeland security issues. Those important developments warrant continued congressional monitoring and oversight.