



Highlights of [GAO-05-530T](#), a testimony to the Subcommittee on Emergency Preparedness, Science, and Technology, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal years 2002 through 2005, the Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP) within the Department of Homeland Security managed first responder grants totaling approximately \$10.5 billion. The bulk of this funding has been for statewide grants through the State Homeland Security Grant Program and urban area grants through the Urban Areas Security Initiative.

This testimony provides information on the history and evolution of these two grant programs, particularly with respect to ODP grant award procedures; timelines for awarding and transferring grant funds; and accountability for effective use of grant funds.

What GAO Recommends

In prior reports on issues related to federal funding and oversight of grants for first responders, GAO has made recommendations for strengthening federal leadership, cooperation, and planning efforts. These include developing a coordinated strategic plan for use of first responder funds in the National Capital Region and monitor the plan's implementation and using grant guidance to encourage the development of statewide plans for interoperable communications. The National Capital Region and DHS agreed with these recommendations and are working to implement them.

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To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact William O. Jenkins, Jr., at (202) 512-8777 or jenkinswo@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Management of First Responder Grant Programs and Efforts to Improve Accountability Continue to Evolve

What GAO Found

Federal first responder grants are a means of achieving an important goal—enhancing the ability of first responders to prevent, prepare for, respond to, and recover from terrorist and other incidents with well-planned, well-coordinated efforts that involve a variety of first responders from multiple jurisdictions. ODP has led federal efforts to develop these capabilities in part through its management of federal first responder grants.

ODP has modified grant award procedures for states and localities. ODP developed procedures and guidelines for awarding the State Homeland Security Grant Program and the Urban Areas Security Initiative grants to states, and for determining how states and localities could expend funds and seek reimbursement for first responder equipment or services they purchased. As part of this process, ODP gave states some flexibility by allowing them to determine how grant funds were to be managed and distributed within their states and whether purchases would be made locally or at the state level.

Congress, ODP, states, and localities have acted to expedite grant awards by setting time limits for the grant application, award, and distribution processes and by instituting other procedures. Nevertheless, the ability of states and localities to spend grant funds expeditiously was complicated by the need to fulfill state and local legal and procurement requirements, which in some cases added months to the purchasing process. Some states have modified their procurement practices, and ODP is identifying best practices to aid in the effort, but challenges remain.

ODP has taken steps to improve accountability in the state preparedness planning process, in part by requiring states to update homeland security strategies. In tandem with this effort, ODP revised its grant-reporting method, moving away from requiring states, localities, and urban areas to submit itemized lists of first responder equipment they plan to purchase towards a more results-based approach, whereby grant managers at all levels must demonstrate how grant expenditures are linked to larger projects that support goals in state homeland security strategies. As part of a broader effort to meet mandates contained in Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, addressing national preparedness goals for all hazards, ODP has taken steps to ensure more assessments of first responder needs are conducted on a national basis. Finally, ODP recently issued interim national preparedness goals that reflect the department's progress in developing readiness targets, priorities, standards for preparedness assessments and strategies, and a system for assessing the nation's overall level of preparedness. However, DHS's task of finalizing these goals and translating them into capabilities that are meaningful and readily transferable to the wide variety of local jurisdictions around the nation is still not complete.