



Highlights of [GAO-06-498](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats, and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

To prepare for potential attacks in the United States involving weapons of mass destruction (WMD), Congress approved the development of National Guard Civil Support Teams (CST) tasked to identify chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, or high-yield explosive weapons; assess consequences; advise civil authorities on response measures; and assist with requests for additional support. Thus far, 36 of the 55 approved teams have been fully certified to conduct their mission. The National Guard Bureau (NGB) is in the process of establishing, certifying, and planning for the long-term sustainment of the CSTs. GAO was asked to address the extent to which (1) the CSTs are ready to conduct their mission and (2) effective administrative mechanisms are in place for the CSTs.

## What GAO Recommends

To ensure the sustainment of CSTs, the Secretary of Defense should work with NGB and the Secretaries of the Army and of the Air Force to clarify the types of non-WMD response efforts that belong in the CST mission; develop guidance to address CST management challenges; and develop guidance and work with state adjutants general to clarify administrative oversight and support structures for CSTs. The Department of Defense (DOD) generally agreed with our recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-498](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-498).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Davi M. D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or [dagostinod@gao.gov](mailto:dagostinod@gao.gov).

## HOMELAND DEFENSE

# National Guard Bureau Needs to Clarify Civil Support Teams' Mission and Address Management Challenges

## What GAO Found

The established CSTs have thus far been trained, equipped, and staffed and have command and control mechanisms in place to conduct their domestic mission. However, confusion resulting from a lack of guidance on the types of non-WMD missions the CSTs can conduct to prepare for their WMD terrorism mission could impede coordination between state authorities and local emergency management officials on the appropriate use of the CSTs. CSTs were created to focus on assisting civil authorities in domestic WMD events. Based on its review of the CSTs' training, equipment, and staffing criteria; analysis of CST readiness data; site visits to 14 CSTs; and discussions with state, local, and federal responders, GAO found the certified teams visited to be ready to conduct their mission. NGB and the states have a clear structure for operational command and control of the CSTs. Though current NGB guidance and the CSTs' message to state and local officials emphasize the CST mission as being focused on WMD events, some CSTs have responded to non-WMD events, such as providing emergency assistance to the Gulf Coast states after the 2005 hurricanes. While NGB views such missions as useful preparations for WMD events, guidance has not been clarified to reflect the type of non-WMD missions that would be appropriate. This lack of clarity has caused confusion among state, local, and NGB officials, potentially slowing coordination efforts. Also, DOD is proposing a limited role for the CSTs to coordinate and operate with Mexican and Canadian officials in the event of a cross-border WMD incident. DOD and NGB are informally considering limited overseas missions for the teams, though they have no plans to request a further expansion of the CSTs' mission to encompass overseas operations. According to NGB and the CST commanders, some overseas missions could provide valuable experience and have a positive effect on CST readiness, while other, more demanding missions, such as supporting the warfighter, could be detrimental to the readiness and availability of the CSTs.

Although NGB continues to develop a long-term sustainment plan for the CST program, going forward, it faces challenges to the administration and management of the CSTs that could impede both the progress of newer teams and the long-term sustainment of the program. NGB has made progress in establishing an administrative management structure for the CSTs, including issuing a broad CST management regulation and initiating a standardization and evaluation program. However, the CSTs face challenges in personnel, coordination plans, equipment acquisition and planning, training objectives, readiness reporting and facilities. Further, insufficient NGB guidance on state National Guard roles and responsibilities for overseeing and supporting their CSTs has resulted in varied support at the state National Guard level. NGB is aware of the challenges and has efforts under way to address them. While these challenges have not yet undermined CST readiness, if NGB efforts are unsuccessful, the progress of newer teams could be impeded and the long-term sustainment of the CST program put at greater risk.