



Highlights of [GAO-04-788T](#), a report to Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Why GAO Did This Study

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, highlighted the critical role first responders play at the state and local level when a disaster or emergency strikes. In fiscal years 2002 and 2003, Congress appropriated approximately \$13.9 billion for domestic preparedness. A large portion of these funds were for the nation's first responders to enhance their ability to address future emergencies, including potential terrorist attacks. These funds are primarily to assist with planning, equipment purchases, training and exercises, and administrative costs. They are available to first responders mainly through the State Homeland Security Grant Programs and Urban Area Security Initiative grants. Both programs are administered through the Department of Homeland Security's Office for Domestic Preparedness.

In this testimony, GAO addressed the need to balance expeditious distribution of first responder funds to states and localities with accountability for effective use of those funds and summarized major findings related to funding distribution delays and delays involving funds received by local governments, as presented in reports issued by the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General and the House Select Committee on Homeland Security. The testimony incorporated supporting evidence on first-responder funding issues based on ongoing GAO work in selected states.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-788T.

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.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

Federal Funds for First Responders

What GAO Found

The reports of the Department of Homeland Security Office of Inspector General (OIG) and the House Select Committee on Homeland Security examined the distribution of funds to states and localities. Both reports found that although there have been delays in getting federal first-responder funds to local governments and first-responder agencies, the grant management requirements, procedures, and processes of the Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP) were not the principal cause. According to the OIG's report, in fiscal years 2002 and 2003, ODP reduced the time required to provide on-line grant application guidance to states, process grant applications, and make grant awards. For example, for fiscal year 2002 grants, it took 292 days, on average, from the time the grant legislation was enacted to the awarding of grants to states. For fiscal year 2003 grants, the total cycle was reduced to 77 days, on average.

According to the reports, most states met deadlines for subgranting first-responder funds to local jurisdictions. The fiscal year 2003 State Homeland Security Grant Programs and Urban Area Security Initiative required states to transfer 80 percent of first-responder grant funds to local jurisdictions within 45 days of the funds being awarded by ODP. Most states met that deadline by counting funds as transferred when states agreed to allocate a specific amount of the grant to a local jurisdiction, the OIG's report found. The House Select Committee staff concurred. And in the three states GAO examined, states certified they had allocated funds to local jurisdictions within the 45-day period.

Delays in allocating grant funds to first responder agencies are frequently due to local legal and procedural requirements, the OIG's report found. State and local governments sometimes delayed delivery of fiscal year 2002 grant funds, for example, because governing and political bodies within the states and local jurisdictions had to approve and accept the grant funds. GAO's work indicated a similar finding. In one state GAO reviewed, roughly four months elapsed from the date the city was notified that grant funds were available to the date when the city council voted to accept the funds.

Both reports GAO reviewed found that state and local procurement processes have, in some cases, been affected by delays resulting from specific procurement requirements. While some states purchase first-responder equipment centrally for all jurisdictions, in some instances, those purchases are made locally and procurement may be delayed by competitive bidding rules, among other things.

It is important to note that those who manage homeland security grants to states and local governments must balance two sometimes competing goals: (1) getting funds to states and localities expeditiously and (2) assuring that there is appropriate planning and accountability for the effective use of the funds.