



Highlights of GAO-03-760, a report to the Secretary of Homeland Security

HOMELAND SECURITY

Efforts to Improve Information Sharing Need to Be Strengthened

Why GAO Did This Study

The sharing of information by federal authorities to state and city governments is critical to effectively execute and unify homeland security efforts. This report examines (1) what initiatives have been undertaken to improve information sharing and (2) whether federal, state, and city officials believe that the current information-sharing process is effective.

What GAO Recommends

We recommend that the Secretary of Homeland Security work with the heads of other federal agencies, and state and city officials to ensure that DHS's enterprise architecture fully integrates states and cities into the information-sharing process; incorporates, where appropriate, other federal, state, and city information-sharing initiatives; takes specific actions to evaluate and overcome perceived barriers to information sharing; and measure progress in improving information sharing as part of the enterprise architecture initiative.

The Departments of Homeland Security and Defense concurred with our report. DHS stated that it has made improvements in information sharing but further progress will require a prudent and deliberate approach. The Central Intelligence Agency provided only technical comments. The Department of Justice did not agree with our findings. However, we believe that our conclusions are well founded.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-760.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Raymond J. Decker at (202) 512-6020 or deckerrj@gao.gov.

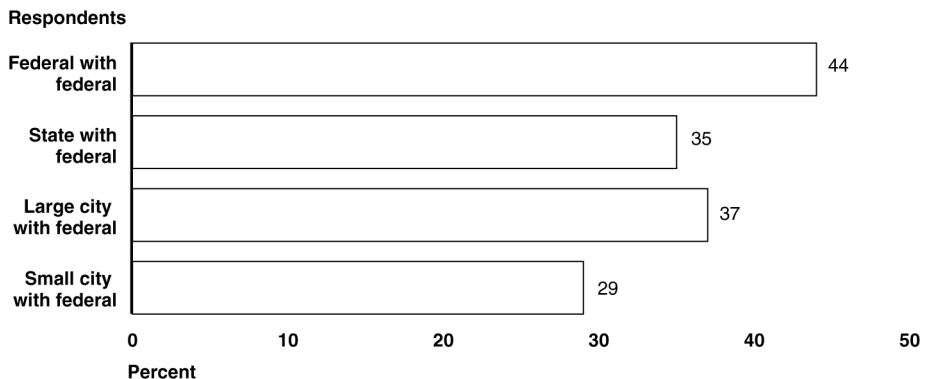
What GAO Found

Since September 11, 2001, federal, state, and city governments have established initiatives to improve the sharing of information to prevent terrorism. Many of these initiatives were implemented by states and cities and not necessarily coordinated with other sharing initiatives, including those by federal agencies. At the same time, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has initiatives under way to enhance information sharing, including the development of a homeland security blueprint, known as an "enterprise architecture," to integrate sharing between federal, state, and city authorities.

GAO surveyed federal, state, and city government officials on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the current information-sharing process. Numerous studies, testimonies, reports, and congressional commissions substantiate our survey results. Overall, no level of government perceived the process as effective, particularly when sharing information with federal agencies. Information on threats, methods, and techniques of terrorists is not routinely shared; and the information that is shared is not perceived as timely, accurate, or relevant. Moreover, federal officials have not yet established comprehensive processes and procedures to promote sharing. Federal respondents cited the inability of state and city officials to secure and protect classified information, the lack of federal security clearances, and a lack of integrated databases as restricting their ability to share information.

DHS needs to strengthen efforts to improve the information sharing process so that the nation's ability to detect or prepare for attacks is strengthened.

Agencies Responding to Our Survey and Indicating That Information Sharing with Federal Agencies Is Effective or Very Effective



Source: GAO.