

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY



Highlights of [GAO-07-683T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Management, Investigations and Oversight, Committee on Homeland Security, U.S. House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

This testimony summarizes GAO's October 2006 report on the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) operations centers—centers run by three DHS components and operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year to conduct monitoring and surveillance activities of potential terrorist activities and other crises. Specifically, GAO assessed the extent to which the centers implemented key practices GAO's work has shown will enhance and sustain collaboration.

In addition, GAO is aware of Congress's concerns about the performance of certain DHS components with regard to situational awareness during Hurricane Katrina, and the recent efforts made in response to these concerns identified in hurricane after-action studies and reports. Because these efforts to some extent affect DHS's response to the recommendations made in GAO's previous report, this testimony briefly describes some of the steps DHS reported that it has taken to address situational awareness problems Katrina exposed. However, because these actions are relatively new, it is too early to assess how well they are being implemented.

To complete this work, GAO spoke to DHS officials and reviewed relevant documentation.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-683T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Eileen Larence at (202) 512-8777 or larencee@gao.gov.

Guidance from Operations Directorate May Enhance Collaboration among Departmental Operations Centers

What GAO Found

The DHS operations centers GAO studied—the Air and Marine Operations Center, the National Targeting Center, the Transportation Security Operations Center, and the National Operations Center—could improve implementation of the key practices GAO identified as having a positive effect on inter-agency collaboration. These key practices include (1) defining common outcomes and joint strategies; (2) assessing each center's needs to leverage resources; (3) defining the roles and responsibilities of the personnel conducting surveillance activities; (4) establishing compatible standards, policies, and procedures for using DHS's primary information sharing network; (5) developing mechanisms to monitor and evaluate results of joint operations; and (6) reinforcing accountability by recognizing joint efforts and outcomes achieved in annual performance plans and reports. The Operations Directorate, established in November 2005 to improve operational efficiency and coordination, provides DHS with an opportunity to more fully implement these key practices by providing guidance to the operations centers. Although GAO recommended that the Directorate provide this guidance, DHS stated that the Directorate does not have control over the component operations centers; therefore, it has not provided guidance to improve collaboration among the centers.

According to DHS, it has given priority to fixing issues that affect situational awareness and its ability to respond to national incidents and disasters, such as Hurricane Katrina. The actions in response to Katrina include establishing standard roles and procedures for reporting information during a major incident and creating a Web-based tool to provide a common view of critical information during a crisis. While DHS has not fully responded to GAO's recommendation for implementing key collaborative practices, it maintains that the initiatives it has implemented since Katrina will improve collaboration and create an environment to address the recommendations in the future.

Staff Conducting Surveillance Activities at Operations Centers



Sources: From left to right: TSA and CBP.