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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-121](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Office for Domestic Preparedness (ODP)—originally established in 1998 within the Department of Justice to help state and local first responders acquire specialized training and equipment needed to respond to terrorist incidents—was transferred to the Department of Homeland Security upon its creation in March 2003. After September 11, 2001, the scope and size of ODP's grant programs expanded. For example, from fiscal year 2001 through fiscal year 2003, ODP grants awarded to states and some urban areas grew from about \$91 million to about \$2.7 billion. This growth raised questions about the ability of ODP and states to ensure that the domestic preparedness grant programs—including statewide and urban area grants—are managed effectively and efficiently.

GAO addressed (1) how statewide and urban area grants were administered in fiscal years 2002 and 2003 so that ODP could ensure that grant funds were spent in accordance with grant guidance and state preparedness planning and (2) what time frames Congress and ODP established for awarding and distributing grants, and how time frames affected the grant cycle.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-121.

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) 512-8757 or jenkinswo@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Management of First Responder Grant Programs Has Improved, but Challenges Remain

What GAO Found

ODP has established and refined grant award procedures for states and localities to improve accountability in state preparedness planning. For fiscal years 2002 and 2003, ODP developed procedures and guidelines for awarding statewide and urban area grants to states and for determining how states and localities could expend funds and seek reimbursement for first responder equipment or services. ODP gave states flexibility by allowing them to determine how grant funds were to be managed and distributed within their states. In fiscal year 2003, ODP required states to update homeland security strategies and related needs assessments prepared in earlier years. These efforts are intended to guide states and localities in targeting grant funds. ODP also took steps to improve grant oversight procedures. Finally, to help meet mandates contained in a presidential directive, ODP has begun drafting national preparedness standards to identify and assess gaps in first responder capabilities on a national basis.

Congress and ODP have acted to expedite grant awards by setting time limits for grant application, award, and distribution processes. For fiscal year 2002 through February 2003, the appropriations statutes did not require ODP to award grant funds to states within a specific time frame. Then, in April 2003, the supplemental appropriations act imposed new deadlines on ODP and the states. As a result, ODP reported that all states submitted grant applications within the mandated 30 days of the grant announcement, and that over 90 percent of grants were awarded within the mandated 15 days of receipt of the applications. ODP also took steps to expedite the transfer of funds from states to local jurisdictions. Nevertheless, the ability of states and localities to spend grant funds expeditiously was complicated by the need to adhere to various legal and procurement requirements. ODP is identifying best practices to help states address the issue.

In reviewing a draft of the report, the Department of Homeland Security generally agreed with GAO's findings; however, it questioned whether the report's title adequately reflected the agency's progress in meeting grant management challenges.



Sources: GAO and Corbis.