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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-05-652](#), a report to the Chairman and Ranking Democratic Member, Subcommittee on Economic Development, Public Buildings, and Emergency Management, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Why GAO Did This Study

The events of September 11, 2001, have resulted in a greater focus on the role of first responders in carrying out the nation's emergency management efforts. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is the primary federal entity responsible for ensuring that first responders, such as police, fire, emergency medical, and public health personnel, have the capabilities needed to provide a coordinated, comprehensive response to any large-scale crisis. In the last 4 years DHS has awarded \$11.3 billion to state and local governments to enhance capabilities, primarily to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from acts of terrorism. Presidential directives instruct DHS to develop a national all-hazards approach—preparing all sectors of society for any emergency event including terrorist attacks and natural or accidental disasters.

This report addresses the following questions: (1) What actions has DHS taken to provide policies and strategies that promote the development of the all-hazards emergency management capabilities of first responders? (2) How do first responders' emergency management capabilities for terrorist attacks differ to capabilities needed for natural or accidental disasters? (3) What emphasis has DHS placed on funding awarded to state and local first responders to enhance all-hazards emergency management capabilities?

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-652.

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.

HOMELAND SECURITY

DHS' Efforts to Enhance First Responders' All-Hazards Capabilities Continue to Evolve

What GAO Found

DHS has undertaken three major policy initiatives aimed at creating a national, all-hazards coordinated and comprehensive response to large-scale incidents: (1) a national response plan (what needs to be done); (2) a command and management process (how it needs to be done); and (3) a national preparedness goal (how well it should be done). GAO reviewed these products and determined that each supports a national, all-hazards approach. DHS has developed plans to implement three related programs to enhance first responder capabilities: (1) to assess and report on the status of first responders' capabilities; (2) to prioritize national resource investments; and (3) to establish a national training and exercise program. Implementing these programs will likely pose a number of challenges for DHS including integrating internal and external assessment approaches, assessing state and local risks in a national context to effectively prioritize investments, and establishing common training requirements across responder disciplines.

Because terrorist attacks share some common characteristics with natural and accidental disasters, 30 of DHS' 36 capabilities first responders need to support preparedness and response efforts are similar. GAO's analysis found that the baseline capabilities required for terrorist attacks and natural or accidental disasters are more similar for response and recovery and differ most for prevention. Because terrorist attacks are planned, intentional acts, all of DHS' prevention capabilities focus on terrorist attacks, while almost all other baseline capabilities focus on all hazards.

Legislation and presidential directives call for DHS to place special emphasis on preparedness for terrorism and DHS has directed that the majority of first responder grant funding be used to enhance first responder capabilities to prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks. Nonetheless, grants funds can have all-hazards applications.

First Responders in Action



Source: FEMA News Photo.