



Highlights of [GAO-09-651](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

From fiscal year 2003 through fiscal year 2009, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) allocated about \$5 billion for the Urban Area Security Initiative (UASI) grant program to enhance regional preparedness capabilities in the nation's highest risk urban areas (UASI regions). The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) administers this program. The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (9/11 Act) required FEMA to change the size of the geographical areas used to assess UASI regions' risk. The conference report accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2008 directed GAO to assess FEMA's efforts to build regional preparedness through the UASI program, and determine how the 9/11 Act change affected UASI regions. This report addresses (1) the extent to which FEMA assesses how UASI regions' collaborative efforts build preparedness capabilities, and (2) how UASI officials described their collaboration efforts and changes resulting from the 9/11 Act. GAO surveyed all 49 UASI regions that received funding prior to the 9/11 Act change, and visited 6 regions selected based on factors such as length of participation. GAO also reviewed FEMA's grant guidance and monitoring systems.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FEMA develop performance measures to assess how regional collaboration efforts funded by UASI grants build preparedness. FEMA concurred with our recommendation.

[View GAO-09-651](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact William O. Jenkins, Jr. (202) 512-8777, jenkinswo@gao.gov.

URBAN AREA SECURITY INITIATIVE

FEMA Lacks Measures to Assess How Regional Collaboration Efforts Build Preparedness Capabilities

What GAO Found

Although FEMA has gathered and summarized data on UASI regions' funding for specific projects and related preparedness priorities and capabilities, it does not have measures to assess how UASI regions' collaborative efforts have built preparedness capabilities. An executive directive, Departmental policy, and agency guidance all require that preparedness priorities and capabilities be measurable so that FEMA can determine current capabilities, gaps, and assess national resource needs. To report on the performance of the UASI program, FEMA has gathered data on UASI regions' funding for projects and the goals and objectives those projects support, including the National Priority to Expand Regional Collaboration. However, FEMA's assessments do not provide a means to measure the effect UASI regions' projects have on building regional preparedness capabilities—the goal of the UASI program. FEMA acknowledged a lack of specific measures that define how or whether national priorities—including expanding regional collaboration—are achieved. In the absence of measures, FEMA directed states to describe their collaborative activities. However, these state activities do not provide a means to assess how regional collaboration activities help build preparedness capabilities. FEMA has an effort underway to establish a comprehensive assessment system to appraise the nation's preparedness capabilities. FEMA could build upon its current efforts to assess overall preparedness by developing and including measures related to the collaboration efforts of UASI regions and their effect on building regional preparedness. This could provide FEMA with more meaningful information on the return on investment of the \$5 billion it has allocated to the UASI program to date.

UASI officials described program activities that they said greatly or somewhat helped support regional collaboration, reflecting factors GAO identified that can enhance and sustain collaboration, and also described a variety of actions taken in response to the 9/11 Act change to assess risk. Regarding program activities that support regional collaboration, of the 49 UASI regions GAO surveyed, 46 said they have active mutual aid agreements in part to share resources among jurisdictions, and 44 described training and exercises as activities they use to build regional preparedness capabilities. Some UASI regions reported changes in membership in response to FEMA's change in the size of the geographical areas used to assess UASI regions' risk. For example, of the 49 regions GAO surveyed, 27 reported that additional jurisdictions were included within the geographical area FEMA used to assess risk that were not included in the region's membership. However, 17 of these regions reported that they had assessed and evaluated the need to include these new jurisdictions in their membership and 3 UASI regions said they plans to do this, while 7 UASI regions said they had no plans to do this.