



Highlights of [GAO-09-133](#), a report to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Integrated Wireless Network (IWN) was intended to be a collaborative effort among the Departments of Justice (DOJ), Homeland Security (DHS), and the Treasury to provide secure, seamless, interoperable, and reliable nationwide wireless communications in support of federal agents and officers engaged in law enforcement, protective services, homeland defense, and disaster response missions. GAO was asked to determine the extent to which the three departments are developing a joint radio communications solution. To address this objective, GAO reviewed and analyzed relevant documentation and interviewed department officials about the extent to which they are collaborating with the other departments on IWN or an alternative joint radio communications solution.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is not recommending executive action. However, Congress should consider, given the critical importance of improving radio communications among federal agencies, requiring that DOJ, DHS, and the Treasury employ key cross-agency collaboration practices to develop a joint radio communications solution. In written comments on a draft of this report, DOJ and DHS largely disagreed with GAO's findings and conclusions. GAO continues to believe that adoption of key collaborative practices is critical.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-133](#). For more information, contact Joel Willemssen at (202) 512-6253 or [willemssenj@gao.gov](mailto:willemssenj@gao.gov).

# RADIO COMMUNICATIONS

## Congressional Action Needed to Ensure Agencies Collaborate to Develop a Joint Solution

### What GAO Found

The Departments of Justice, Homeland Security, and the Treasury had originally intended IWN to be a joint radio communications solution to improve communication among law enforcement agencies; however, IWN is no longer being pursued as a joint development project. Instead of focusing on a joint solution, the departments have begun independently modernizing their own wireless communications systems. While the Departments of Justice and the Treasury (and later the Department of Homeland Security) collaborated on a pilot demonstration of IWN in the Seattle/Blaine area that continues to provide service to multiple agencies, the departments have determined that this specific system design cannot be implemented on a nationwide scale, and they have not acted collaboratively to identify an alternative approach for a jointly coordinated communications solution. In addition, the formal governance structure that was established among the three departments has been disbanded, and the contract for developing a new IWN design, awarded over a year and a half ago, is not being used jointly by the departments for this purpose. Currently, the Department of Justice is planning to implement a nationwide network for its component agencies, and the Department of Homeland Security and its components are pursuing numerous independent solutions.

A primary reason why the collaboration on a joint communications solution has not been successful is that the departments did not effectively employ key cross-agency collaboration practices. Specifically, they could not agree on a common outcome or purpose to overcome their differences in missions, cultures, and established ways of doing business; they have not established a collaborative governance structure with a process for decision making and resolving disputes; and they have not developed a joint strategy for moving forward. While the Department of Homeland Security considers improving radio communications at the nation's borders to be a major priority, the Department of Justice's priorities are in other areas. Program officials from both departments acknowledged that these differing priorities led to an inability to resolve conflicts. As a result, they now have several initiatives aimed at high-level coordination, none of which are focused on developing a joint communications solution. While department officials have signed an updated memorandum of understanding related to coordinating their radio communications projects, they have not made any progress on reestablishing a joint governance structure and decision-making procedures to address the challenges of collaborating on a joint communications solution.

In abandoning collaboration on a joint solution, the departments risk duplication of effort and inefficient use of resources as they continue to invest significant resources in independent solutions. Further, these efforts will not ensure the interoperability needed to serve day-to-day law enforcement operations or a coordinated response to terrorist or other events.