



Highlights of [GAO-04-509](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) faces the daunting task of bringing together 22 diverse agencies to lead efforts to protect the homeland. Among the challenges posed by this transformation is integrating these agencies' diverse information technology (IT) systems: mission support, administration, and infrastructure (e.g., networks). GAO was asked to determine (1) whether DHS has defined its IT systems integration strategy and (2) how DHS is ensuring that IT investments made by component agencies (specifically focusing on the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Transportation Security Administration, and the Coast Guard) are aligned with the department's strategic direction.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to the Secretary aimed at limiting the department's investment in IT systems until the department's IT strategic management framework is sufficiently defined and the department's CIO has sufficient authority to effectively implement it.

GAO provided a draft of this report to DHS for comment. In its comments, DHS did not agree or disagree with our findings, conclusions, or recommendations. Rather, the comments provided information on DHS's IT challenges and priorities that is consistent with our report.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-509](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-509).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or [hiter@gao.gov](mailto:hiter@gao.gov).

## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

# Homeland Security Should Better Balance Need for System Integration Strategy with Spending for New and Enhanced Systems

## What GAO Found

DHS is developing an IT systems integration strategy through its ongoing efforts to finalize and implement an IT strategic plan, an enterprise architecture, and IT capital planning and investment control processes. According to the department, these three elements—which are essential parts of a framework for achieving effective systems integration—are areas of focus and planned to be fully in place before the end of 2004. The DHS Chief Information Officer (CIO) attributed the limited progress on the systems integration framework to date to (1) insufficient staffing, (2) higher priority demands (such as establishing a departmentwide e-mail system), and (3) near-term high-payoff opportunities (such as consolidating wireless communication capabilities).

In the interim, DHS and its components have taken steps intended to promote the alignment of its components' ongoing and planned IT investments with the department's strategic direction. The steps include (1) subjecting major investments to review and approval by various departmental investment review boards, (2) continuing to have component agencies follow the IT strategic management structures and processes that they had before the department was formed, and (3) having meetings between component staff responsible for IT investments and staff working on the department's IT strategic management framework. GAO corroborated the department's use of this approach through analysis of IT investments being pursued by three DHS components, which the components indicated were representative of their general approach to aligning investments with the department's evolving strategic direction.

While these steps have merit, they do not provide adequate assurance of strategic alignment across the department. For example, the second step simply continues the various approaches that produced the diverse systems that the department inherited, while the third relies too heavily on oral communication about complex IT strategic issues that are not yet fully defined—which increases the chances of misunderstanding and missed opportunities for integration. Moreover, the DHS CIO does not have authority and control over departmentwide IT spending—although such control is important for effective systems integration, as shown by GAO's research on successful private and public sector organizations and experience at federal agencies. Until its IT strategic framework is fully defined and effectively implemented, DHS runs the risk that the component agencies' ongoing investments—collectively costing billions of dollars in fiscal year 2004—will need to be reworked in the future, so that they can be effectively integrated and provide maximum value across DHS.