



Highlights of [GAO-06-899T](#), testimony before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works

Why GAO Did This Study

Terrorist attacks on U.S. chemical facilities could damage public health and the economy. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) coordinates federal efforts to protect these facilities from attacks.

GAO was asked to provide a statement for the record based on its report *Homeland Security: DHS Is Taking Steps to Enhance Security at Chemical Facilities, but Additional Authority Is Needed* (GAO-06-150, January 27, 2006), GAO reviewed (1) DHS's actions to develop a strategy to protect chemical plants, assist with the industry's security efforts, and coordinate with other federal agencies, (2) industry security initiatives, (3) DHS's authorities and the need for additional security legislation, and (4) stakeholders' views on any requirements to use safer technologies.

What GAO Recommends

GAO's report recommended that (1) the Congress consider giving DHS the authority to require the chemical industry to address plant security, (2) DHS complete its Chemical Sector-Specific Plan in a timely manner, and (3) DHS study, with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the security benefits of using safer technologies. DHS agreed in substance with GAO's first two recommendations but expressed concerns about studying safer technologies. GAO continues to see merit in such a study. EPA had no comments on the report.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-899T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact John Stephenson at (202) 512-3841 or stephensonj@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

DHS Is Addressing Security at Chemical Facilities, but Additional Authority Is Needed

What GAO Found

DHS is developing a Chemical Sector-Specific Plan, which is intended to, among other things, describe DHS's ongoing efforts and future plans to coordinate with federal, state, and local agencies and the private sector; identify chemical facilities to include in the sector, assess their vulnerabilities, and prioritize them; and develop programs to prevent, deter, mitigate, and recover from attacks on chemical facilities. DHS officials told GAO that they now expect to complete and release the plan in the fall of 2006. In addition, DHS has taken a number of actions to protect the chemical sector from terrorist attacks. DHS identified 3,400 facilities that, if attacked, could pose the greatest hazard to human life and health and has initiated programs to assist the industry and local communities in protecting chemical plants. DHS also coordinates with the Chemical Sector Coordinating Council, an industry-led group that acts as a liaison for the chemical sector, and with EPA and other federal agencies.

The chemical industry is voluntarily addressing plant security, but faces challenges. Some industry associations require member companies to assess plants' vulnerabilities, develop and implement mitigation plans, and have a third party verify that security measures were implemented. Other associations have developed guidelines and other tools to encourage their members to address security. Industry officials said that high costs and limited guidance on how much security is adequate create challenges in preparing facilities against terrorism.

Because existing laws provide DHS with only limited authority to address security at chemical facilities, it has relied primarily on the industry's voluntary security efforts. However, the extent to which companies are addressing security is unclear. DHS does not have the authority to require chemical facilities to assess their vulnerabilities and implement security measures. Therefore, DHS cannot ensure that facilities are taking these actions. DHS has stated that its existing authorities do not permit it to effectively regulate the chemical industry, and that the Congress should enact federal requirements for chemical facilities. Many stakeholders agreed—as GAO concluded in 2003 and again in January 2006—that additional legislation placing federal security requirements on chemical facilities is needed.

Stakeholders had mixed views on whether any chemical security legislation should require plants to substitute safer chemicals and processes, which could lessen the potential consequences of an attack, but could be costly or infeasible for some plants. DHS has stated that safer practices may make facilities less attractive to terrorist attack, but may shift risks rather than eliminate them. Environmental groups told GAO that they favored including or considering inherently safer technologies in any federal requirements, but most industry officials GAO contacted opposed a requirement to use safer technologies because they may shift risks or be prohibitively expensive.