

Department of Homeland Security



Highlights of [GAO-03-102](#), a report to Congress included as part of GAO's Performance and Accountability Series

Why GAO Did This Report

The new Department of Homeland Security (DHS) faces unique opportunities and risks for ensuring the nation's homeland security. The implementation and transformation of DHS will be complex, and the components being merged into the new department already face a wide array of existing challenges. The information GAO presents in this report is intended to sustain congressional attention and a departmental focus on addressing these challenges. This report is part of a special series of reports on governmentwide and agency-specific issues.

What Needs to Be Done

DHS must effectively integrate disparate agencies and activities into a cohesive organization to achieve the synergy for providing better homeland security against terrorism. DHS should adopt public and private sector best practices, and build necessary management capacity and oversight mechanisms to implement and transform the new department. DHS also must create and maintain a structure that can leverage partners and stakeholders to effectively implement the national homeland security strategy. Finally, DHS must confront a wide array of existing major management challenges and program risks in its incoming agencies.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-102.

To view the full report, click on the link above. For more information, contact Randall Yim at (202) 512-3580 or yimr@gao.gov or Patricia Dalton at (202) 512-6806 or daltonp@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

DHS faces enormous challenges to protect the nation from terrorism. DHS must effectively combine 22 agencies with an estimated 170,000 employees specializing in various disciplines, including law enforcement, border security, biological research, computer security, and disaster mitigation. Further, DHS will oversee a number of non-homeland security activities.

GAO has designated the implementation and transformation of DHS as a high risk for three reasons. First, the size and complexity of the effort make the challenge especially daunting, requiring sustained attention and time to achieve the department's mission in an effective and efficient manner. Second, components being merged into DHS already face a wide array of existing challenges that must be addressed. Finally, DHS's failure to effectively carry out its mission exposes the nation to potentially very serious consequences.

Building an effective department will require sustained leadership from top management to ensure the transformation of disparate agencies, programs, and missions into an integrated organization. DHS leadership can learn from the best practices of the private and public sectors to become a high-performance organization. Achieving the national homeland security strategy will require the current transition plan to be more comprehensive by addressing the full transition period and by identifying key activities and milestones. Critical aspects of DHS's success will depend on well-functioning relationships with third parties that will take time to establish and maintain, including those with states and local governments, the private sector, and other federal agencies with homeland security responsibilities. DHS's leadership will also need to focus on certain critical success factors, including human capital, information technology management, acquisition management, and financial management to create a results-oriented and accountable department for the long term.

The new department is being formed from components with a wide array of existing major management challenges and program risks. In fact, many of the major components merging into the new department, including the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Transportation Security Administration, Customs Service, Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the Coast Guard, face at least one major problem such as strategic human capital risks, information technology management challenges, or financial management vulnerabilities; they also confront an array of program operations challenges and risks.

In the final analysis, the success of DHS's implementation and transformation will depend largely on its ability to attract and retain the right people; set the appropriate priorities for the department; and build effective partnerships with the appropriate public, private, and not-for-profit sector entities.