



Highlights of [GAO-08-457T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Homeland Security, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) began operations in March 2003 with missions that include preventing terrorist attacks from occurring within the United States, reducing U.S. vulnerability to terrorism, minimizing damages from attacks that occur, and helping the nation recover from any attacks. GAO has reported that the implementation and transformation of DHS is an enormous management challenge and that the size, complexity, and importance of the effort make the challenge especially daunting and critical to the nation's security. GAO's prior work on mergers and acquisitions found that successful transformations of large organizations, even those faced with less strenuous reorganizations than DHS, can take at least 5 to 7 years to achieve. This testimony is based on GAO's August 2007 report evaluating DHS's progress between March 2003 and July 2007, selected reports issued since July 2007, and our institutional knowledge of homeland security issues.

What GAO Recommends

While this testimony contains no new recommendations, GAO has made approximately 900 recommendations to DHS over the past 5 years to strengthen departmental operations. DHS has implemented some of these recommendations and is in the process of implementing others.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-457T](#). For more information, contact Norm Rabkin at (202) 512-8777 or rabkinn@gao.gov.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Progress Made in Implementation of Management and Mission Functions, but More Work Remains

What GAO Found

Since its establishment, DHS has made progress in implementing its management and mission functions in the areas of acquisition, financial, human capital, information technology, and real property management; border security; immigration enforcement and services; aviation, surface transportation, and maritime security; emergency preparedness and response; critical infrastructure protection; and science and technology. In general, DHS has made more progress in its mission areas than in its management areas, reflecting an initial focus on protecting the homeland. While DHS has made progress in implementing its functions in each management and mission area, we identified challenges remaining in each of these areas. These challenges include providing appropriate oversight for contractors; improving financial management and controls; implementing a performance-based human capital management system; implementing information technology management controls; balancing trade facilitation and border security; improving enforcement of immigration laws, enhancing transportation security; and effectively coordinating the mitigation and response to all hazards.

Key issues that have affected DHS's implementation efforts are agency transformation, strategic planning and results management, risk management, information sharing, partnerships and coordination, and accountability and transparency. For example, GAO designated DHS's implementation and transformation as high-risk. While DHS has made progress in transforming its component agencies into a fully functioning department, it has not yet addressed key elements of the transformation process, such as developing a comprehensive transformation strategy. The Homeland Security Act of 2002, as amended, requires DHS to develop a transition and succession plan to guide the transition of management functions to a new Administration; DHS is working to develop and implement its approach for managing the transition. DHS has begun to develop performance goals and measures in some areas in an effort to strengthen its ability to measure its progress in key areas. We commend DHS's efforts and have agreed to work with the department to provide input to help strengthen established measures. DHS also has not yet fully adopted and applied a risk management approach in implementing its mission functions. Although some DHS components have taken steps to do so, this approach has not yet been implemented departmentwide.

DHS's 5-year anniversary provides an opportunity for the department to review how it has matured as an organization. As part of our broad range of work reviewing DHS's management and mission programs, GAO will continue to assess DHS's progress in addressing high-risk issues. In particular, GAO will continue to assess the progress made by the department in its transformation and information sharing efforts.