



Highlights of [GAO-10-142](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

There is ongoing concern about the security of federal buildings and their occupants. The Federal Protective Service (FPS) within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is responsible for providing law enforcement and related security services for nearly 9,000 federal buildings under the control and custody of the General Services Administration (GSA). In 2004, GAO identified a set of key protection practices from the collective practices of federal agencies and the private sector that included: *allocating resources using risk management, leveraging technology, and information sharing and coordination*. As requested, GAO determined whether FPS's security efforts for GSA buildings reflected key practices. To meet this objective, GAO used its key practices as criteria, visited five sites to gain firsthand knowledge, analyzed pertinent DHS and GSA documents, and interviewed DHS, GSA, and tenant agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to the Secretary of Homeland Security. These include instructing FPS to report regularly to the Secretary on its new risk management and countermeasures programs, develop guidance for cost-effectively leveraging technology, and determine information sharing parameters with GSA. DHS concurred with the report's recommendations.

View [GAO-10-142](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Mark L. Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or goldsteinm@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

Greater Attention to Key Practices Would Improve the Federal Protective Service's Approach to Facility Protection

What GAO Found

FPS's approach to securing GSA buildings reflects some aspects of key protection practices, and FPS has several improvements underway such as a new risk assessment program and a countermeasure acquisition program. While FPS's protection activities exhibit some aspects of the key practices, GAO found limitations in each of the areas.

FPS assesses risk and recommends countermeasures to GSA and tenant agencies; however, FPS's ability to influence the *allocation of resources using risk management* is limited because resource allocation decisions are the responsibility of GSA and tenant agencies, which may be unwilling to fund FPS's countermeasure recommendations. Moreover, FPS uses an outdated risk assessment tool and a subjective, time-consuming process. As a result, GSA and tenant agencies are uncertain whether risks are being mitigated. Concerned with the quality and timeliness of FPS's risk assessment services, GSA and tenant agencies are pursuing some of these activities on their own. Although FPS is developing a new risk management program, full implementation is not planned until the end of fiscal year 2011 and has already experienced delays.

With regard to *leveraging technology*, FPS inspectors have considerable latitude for selecting technologies and countermeasures that tenant agencies fund, but FPS provides inspectors with little training and guidance for making cost-effective choices. Additionally, FPS does not provide tenant agencies with an analysis of alternative technologies, their cost, and associated reduction in risk. As a result, there is limited assurance that the recommendations inspectors make are the best available alternatives and tenant agencies must make resource allocation decisions without key information. Although FPS is developing a program to standardize security equipment and contracting, the program has run behind schedule and lacks an evaluative component for assessing the cost-effectiveness of competing technologies and countermeasures.

FPS has developed *information sharing and coordination* mechanisms with GSA and tenant agencies, but there is inconsistency in the type of information shared and the frequency of coordination. Lack of coordination through regular contact can lead to communication breakdowns. For example, during a construction project at one location, the surveillance equipment that FPS was responsible for maintaining was removed from the site during 2007. FPS and tenant agency representatives disagree over whether FPS was notified of this action. Furthermore, FPS and GSA disagree over what building risk assessment information can be shared. FPS maintains that the sensitive information contained in the assessments is not needed for GSA to carry out its mission. However, GSA maintains that restricted access to the risk assessments constrains its ability to protect buildings and occupants.