



Highlights of [GAO-10-386](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

In addition to its primary mission of warfighting, the Department of Defense (DOD) plays an important role in civil support. Four years after the poorly coordinated national response to Hurricane Katrina, issues remain about DOD's progress in identifying its capability requirements for supporting a coordinated civilian-military response to a catastrophic domestic event. This report addresses the extent to which DOD (1) has identified and addressed its capability gaps for its civil support mission; (2) has clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and relationships and identified appropriate levels and types of personnel to assign to the FEMA regions; and (3) shares and tracks information concerning its civil support requirements response process with civil authorities. To do this, GAO analyzed DOD civil support guidance and plans and met with DOD and FEMA officials regarding the support that civilian authorities may request during a catastrophic incident.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD update its civil support guidance to reflect current doctrine; clearly define roles, responsibilities, and relationships for personnel assigned to manage civilian requests for assistance; conduct a staffing needs assessment for Defense Coordinating Officers; and establish an official system to track requests for assistance across DOD that is accessible to DOD's interagency partners. DOD concurred with our recommendations.

View [GAO-10-386](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Davi M. D'Agostino at (202) 512-5431 or dagostinod@gao.gov.

HOMELAND DEFENSE

DOD Can Enhance Efforts to Identify Capabilities to Support Civil Authorities during Disasters

What GAO Found

DOD has identified capability gaps for its civil support mission by completing a capabilities-based assessment, but key DOD policies and guidance for the civil support mission are outdated, limiting DOD's ability to fully address capability gaps. DOD's strategic guidance requires that it anticipate requests for civil support by identifying capability gaps. However, inconsistency and misalignment across DOD's policies, strategy, and doctrine for civil support make it difficult for DOD to address capability gaps and pre-position equipment and supplies. GAO found this was due to outdated key DOD policies and guidance that do not reflect DOD's current organizational framework for providing assistance to civil authorities. If DOD updates key policies for civil support, it will be better able to address capability gaps and provide timely and appropriate support to civil authorities.

DOD has increased its personnel dedicated to coordinate civilian requests for assistance, but it has not clearly defined their roles, responsibilities, and relationships, and its staffing is not based upon a staffing assessment by FEMA region. DOD guidance calls for coordination with federal and state authorities on military capabilities for civil support. However, while the Defense Coordinating Officer program has improved civil authorities' overall awareness of DOD's capabilities, roles, and responsibilities, command and control and coordination among the Defense Coordinating Officers and the military services' liaison officers have been confusing and sometimes problematic because DOD's civil support guidance is outdated. Further, DOD officials noted that staffing of the Defense Coordinating Officer program should reflect its multiservice environment and the unique challenges of each FEMA region. Different FEMA regions are prone to different disasters and have varying needs for DOD support, but the size and composition of the Defense Coordinating Officers' staff—nearly all from the Army—were not based on a staffing needs assessment. Therefore, they do not necessarily reflect variations in the support needs of the regions. As a result, DOD may be missing an opportunity to optimize its ability to provide a coordinated response to civil authorities with appropriate multiservice capabilities.

While DOD follows established processes in responding to requests for assistance from civil authorities, it has not established a system to track civilian requests that is accessible to DOD's interagency partners. The *National Response Framework* broadly identifies how DOD responds to requests for assistance, and DOD guidance further specifies DOD's processes. However, civil authorities are not fully aware of the length of this process. While DOD has several different tracking systems in use by different DOD components for the civil support mission, it lacks a formal, interoperable, and unclassified system for tracking all requests for assistance across DOD. Without such a system, gaps will remain in gaining real-time situational awareness and maintaining a common operational picture of DOD support for all federal partners in disaster-response missions including DOD.