



Testimony

Before the Committee on Homeland  
Security and Governmental Affairs,  
U.S. Senate

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# HOMELAND SECURITY

## Federal Protective Service Continues to Face Challenges with Contract Guards and Risk Assessments at Federal Facilities

Statement of Mark L. Goldstein, Director  
Physical Infrastructure Team

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-235T](#), testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

As part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Protective Service (FPS) is responsible for protecting federal employees and visitors in approximately 9,600 federal facilities under the control and custody of the General Services Administration (GSA). Recent incidents at federal facilities demonstrate their continued vulnerability to attacks or other acts of violence. To help accomplish its mission, FPS conducts facility security assessments and has approximately 13,500 contract security guards deployed to federal facilities.

This testimony discusses challenges FPS faces in (1) ensuring contract security guards deployed to federal facilities are properly trained and certified and (2) conducting risk assessments at federal facilities. It is based on GAO work issued from 2008 through 2013 on FPS's contract guard and risk assessment programs, and preliminary results of GAO's ongoing work to determine the extent to which FPS and select federal agencies' facility risk assessment methodologies align with federal risk assessment standards. To perform this work, GAO reviewed FPS's and eight federal agencies' risk assessment documentation and compared it to the Interagency Security Committee (ISC) standards. These agencies were selected based on their missions and types of facilities.

## What GAO Recommends

DHS and FPS agreed with the recommendations in GAO's 2012 and 2013 reports to improve FPS's contract guard and risk assessment processes.

View [GAO-14-235T](#). For more information, contact Mark Goldstein, (202) 512-2834 or [GoldsteinM@gao.gov](mailto:GoldsteinM@gao.gov)

December 2013

## HOMELAND SECURITY

### Federal Protective Service Continues to Face Challenges with Contract Guards and Risk Assessments at Federal Facilities

## What GAO Found

FPS faces challenges ensuring that contract guards have been properly trained and certified before being deployed to federal facilities around the country. In its September 2013 report, GAO found that providing active shooter response and screener training is a challenge for FPS. For example, according to officials at five guard companies, their contract guards have not received training on how to respond during incidents involving an active shooter. Without ensuring that all guards receive training on how to respond to incidents at federal facilities involving an active-shooter, FPS has limited assurance that its guards are prepared for this threat. Similarly, an official from one of FPS's contract guard companies stated that 133 (about 38 percent) of its approximately 350 guards have never received screener training. As a result, guards deployed to federal facilities may be using x-ray and magnetometer equipment that they are not qualified to use which raises questions about their ability to screen access control points at federal facilities—one of their primary responsibilities. GAO was unable to determine the extent to which FPS's guards have received active-shooter response and screener training, in part, because FPS lacks a comprehensive and reliable system for guard oversight. FPS agreed with GAO's 2013 recommendation that they take steps to identify guards that have not had required training and provide it to them. GAO also found that FPS continues to lack effective management controls to ensure its guards have met its training and certification requirements. For instance, although FPS agreed with GAO's 2012 recommendation that it develop a comprehensive and reliable system for managing information on guards' training, certifications, and qualifications, it does not yet have such a system.

FPS also continues to face challenges assessing risk at federal facilities. GAO reported in 2012 that FPS is not assessing risks at federal facilities in a manner consistent with federal standards. GAO's preliminary results from its ongoing work on risk assessments at federal facilities indicate that this is still a challenge for FPS and several other federal agencies. Federal standards, such as the *National Infrastructure Protection Plan's* risk management framework and ISC's risk assessment provisions, state that a risk assessment should include threat, vulnerability, and consequence assessments. Risk assessments help decision-makers identify and evaluate security risks and implement protective measures to mitigate the risk. Instead of conducting risk assessments, FPS is using an interim vulnerability assessment tool, referred to as the Modified Infrastructure Survey Tool (MIST) to assess federal facilities until it develops a longer-term solution. However, MIST does not assess consequence (the level, duration, and nature of potential loss resulting from an undesirable event). Three of the four risk assessment experts GAO spoke with generally agreed that a tool that does not estimate consequences does not allow an agency to fully assess risks. Thus, FPS has limited knowledge of the risks facing about 9,600 federal facilities around the country. FPS officials stated that they did not include consequence information in MIST because it was not part of the original design. GAO will continue to monitor this issue and plans to report its final results early next year.

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Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Coburn, and Members of the Committee:

We are pleased to be here to discuss the efforts of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Protective Service (FPS) to protect the nearly 9,600 federal facilities that are under the control and custody of the General Services Administration (GSA), including the challenges associated with FPS's use of contract guards and risk assessments. The 2012 shooting at the Anderson Federal Building in Long Beach, California, the results of our 2009 covert testing, and FPS's ongoing penetration testing demonstrate the continued vulnerability of federal facilities. Although FPS does not protect the Washington Navy Yard, the recent killing of 13 people there once again showed how federal facilities can become targets of violence. The challenge of protecting federal facilities is one of the major reasons why we have designated federal real property management as a high-risk area.<sup>1</sup>

FPS is authorized to (1) protect the buildings, grounds, and property that are under the control and custody of GSA, as well as the persons on the property; (2) enforce federal laws and regulations aimed at protecting such property and persons on the property; and (3) investigate offenses against these buildings and persons.<sup>2</sup> FPS conducts its mission by providing security services through two types of activities:

- physical security activities—conducting security assessments and recommending countermeasures aimed at preventing incidents—and
- law enforcement activities—proactively patrolling facilities, responding to incidents, conducting criminal investigations, and exercising arrest authority. To accomplish its mission, FPS currently has almost 1,200 full-time employees and about 13,500 contract guards deployed at

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<sup>1</sup>GAO, *High Risk Series: An Update*, [GAO-13-283](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 14, 2013).

<sup>2</sup>Section 1315(a) of title 40, United States Code, provides that: "To the extent provided for by transfers made pursuant to the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the Secretary of Homeland Security... shall protect the buildings, grounds, and property that are owned, occupied, or secured by the Federal Government (including any agency, instrumentality, or wholly owned or mixed-ownership corporation thereof) and the persons on the property."

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federal facilities across the country. It expects to receive approximately \$1.3 billion in fees for fiscal year 2013.<sup>3</sup>

Since 2008, we have reported on the challenges FPS faces with carrying out its mission, including overseeing its contract guards and assessing risk at federal facilities. FPS's contract guard program is the most visible component of the agency's operations, and the agency relies on its guards to be its "eyes and ears" while performing their duties. However, we reported in 2010 and again in 2013 that FPS continues to experience difficulty ensuring that its guards have the required training and certifications. Before guards are assigned to a post (an area of responsibility) at a federal facility, FPS requires that they all undergo employee fitness determinations<sup>4</sup> and complete approximately 120 hours of training provided by the contractor and FPS, including basic training and firearms training. Among other duties, contract guards are responsible for controlling access to facilities; conducting screening at access points to prevent the introduction of prohibited items, such as weapons and explosives; and responding to emergency situations involving facility safety and security.<sup>5</sup> FPS also faces challenges assessing risks at the 9,600 facilities under the control and custody of GSA. For instance, in 2012, we reported that FPS's ability to protect and secure federal facilities has been hampered by the absence of a risk assessment program that is consistent with federal standards. To address this issue, we made several recommendations which FPS agreed to implement. These recommendations and their status are discussed later in this statement.

This testimony discusses challenges FPS faces in (1) ensuring contract security guards deployed to federal facilities are properly trained and certified and (2) conducting risk assessments at federal facilities. It is based on our reports and testimonies issued from 2008 through 2013 on

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<sup>3</sup>To fund its operations, FPS charges fees for its security services to federal tenant agencies in GSA-controlled facilities.

<sup>4</sup>A contractor employee's fitness determination is based on the employee's suitability for work for or on behalf of the government based on character and conduct.

<sup>5</sup>In general, contract guards may only detain, not arrest, individuals at their facility. Some contract guards may have arrest authority under conditions set forth by the individual states.

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FPS's contract guard and risk assessment programs.<sup>6</sup> A list of these related products appears at the end of my statement. As part of the work for these products, we reviewed relevant statutes and federal guidance; examined FPS contract guard and risk assessment processes and procedures; reviewed a sample of contract guard files; conducted site visits to FPS's 11 regions where we interviewed FPS officials; and interviewed FPS's 31 guard companies and 4 risk management experts. This testimony is also based on preliminary results of our ongoing effort to determine the extent to which FPS and select other federal agencies assess risk in accordance with federal risk assessment standards. We plan to issue our report early next year. As part of that work, we reviewed and analyzed risk assessment documentation and interviewed officials at nine federal agencies and compared each agency's methodology to Interagency Security Committee (ISC) standards. The nine selected agencies include: Department of Energy, Office of Health, Safety, and Security; Department of Interior; Department of Justice, Justice Protective Service; Department of State, Diplomatic Security; Department of Veterans Affairs; Federal Emergency Management Agency; Federal Protective Service; Nuclear Regulatory Commission; and Office of Personnel Management. These agencies were selected to achieve diversity with respect to the number and types of agencies' facilities, as well as the agencies' missions.

We conducted our ongoing work from August 2012 to December 2013 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Also, our previously issued testimonies and reports were conducted in accordance with these standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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<sup>6</sup>GAO, *Federal Protective Service: Challenges with Oversight of Contract Guard Program Still Exist, and Additional Management Controls Are Needed*, [GAO-13-694](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2013); GAO, *Federal Protective Service: Actions Needed to Assess Risk and Better Manage Contract Guards at Federal Facilities*, [GAO-12-739](#) (Washington, D.C.: August 2012), GAO, *Homeland Security: Federal Protective Service's Contract Guard Program Requires More Oversight and Reassessment of Use of Contract Guards*, [GAO-10-341](#) (Washington, D.C.: April 2010) and GAO, *Homeland Security: The Federal Protective Service Faces Several Challenges That Hamper Its Ability to Protect Federal Facilities*, [GAO-08-683](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 2008).

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Additional details about the scope and methodology can be found in each of these related reports.

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## FPS Faces Challenges Ensuring Contract Guards Have Been Properly Trained and Certified before Being Deployed to Federal Facilities

### Some FPS Contract Guards Have Not Received Required Training on Responding to Active-Shooter Scenarios

According to FPS officials, since 2010 the agency has required its guards to receive training on how to respond to an active-shooter scenario. However, as our 2013 report shows,<sup>7</sup> FPS faces challenges providing active-shooter response training to all of its guards. Without ensuring that all guards receive training on how to respond to active-shooter incidents, FPS has limited assurance that its guards are prepared for this threat. According to FPS officials, the agency provides guards with information on how they should respond during an active-shooter incident as part of the 8-hour FPS-provided orientation training. FPS officials were not able to specify how much time is devoted to this training, but said that it is a small portion of the 2-hour special situations training.<sup>8</sup> According to FPS's training documents, this training includes instructions on how to notify law enforcement personnel, secure the guard's area of responsibility, appropriate use of force, and direct building occupants according to emergency plans.

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<sup>7</sup>[GAO-13-694](#).

<sup>8</sup>This training is provided during a block of training on special situations, which includes information on how guards should respond to situations other than their normal duties, such as reports of missing or abducted children, bomb threats, and active-shooter scenarios. FPS officials stated that guards hired before 2010 should have received this information during guard-company-provided training on the guards' post orders (which outline the guards' duties and responsibilities) as part of basic and refresher training.

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We were unable to determine the extent to which FPS's guards have received active-shooter response training, in part, because FPS lacks a comprehensive and reliable system for guard oversight (as discussed below). When we asked officials from 16 of the 31 contract guard companies we contacted if their guards had received training on how to respond during active-shooter incidents, responses varied.<sup>9</sup> For example, of the 16 contract guard companies we interviewed about this topic:

- officials from eight contract guard companies stated that their guards had received active-shooter scenario training during FPS orientation;
- officials from five guard companies stated that FPS has not provided active-shooter scenario training to their guards during the FPS-provided orientation training; and
- officials from three guard companies stated that FPS had not provided active-shooter scenario training to their guards during the FPS-provided orientation training, but that the topic was covered at some other time.

DHS and FPS agreed with our 2013 recommendation to take immediate steps to determine which guards have not had screener or active-shooter scenario training and provide it to them and, as part of developing a national curriculum, decide how and how often these trainings will be provided in the future.

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### Some FPS Contract Guards Have Not Received Required Screener Training

As part of their 120 hours of training required by FPS, guards must receive 8 hours of screener training from FPS on how to use x-ray and magnetometer equipment. However, in our September 2013 report,<sup>10</sup> we found that FPS has not provided required screener training to all guards. Screener training is important because many guards control access points at federal facilities and thus must be able to properly operate x-ray and magnetometer machines and understand their results. In 2009 and 2010, we reported that FPS had not provided screener training to 1,500 contract guards in one FPS region.<sup>11</sup> In response to those reports, FPS

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<sup>9</sup>The remaining 15 guard companies did not respond to this question.

<sup>10</sup>[GAO-13-694](#).

<sup>11</sup>GAO, *Homeland Security: Federal Protective Service Has Taken Some Initial Steps to Address Its Challenges, but Vulnerabilities Still Exist*, [GAO-09-1047T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 23, 2009) and [GAO-10-341](#).

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stated that it planned to implement a program to train its inspectors to provide screener training to all its contract guards.

We were unable to determine the extent to which FPS's guards have received screener training, but information from guard companies we contacted indicate that guards continue to be deployed to federal facilities who have never received this training. For example, an official at one contract guard company stated that 133 of its approximately 350 guards (about 38 percent) on three separate FPS contracts (awarded in 2009) have never received their initial x-ray and magnetometer training from FPS. The official stated that some of these guards are working at screening posts. Further, officials at another contract guard company in a different FPS region stated that, according to their records, 78 of 295 (about 26 percent) guards deployed under their contract have never received FPS's x-ray and magnetometer training. These officials stated that FPS's regional officials were informed of the problem, but allowed guards to continue to work under this contract, despite not having completed required training. Because FPS is responsible for this training, according to guard company officials no action was taken against the company. Consequently, some guards deployed to federal facilities may be using x-ray and magnetometer equipment that they are not qualified to use—thus raising questions about the ability of some guards to execute a primary responsibility to properly screen access control points at federal facilities.

As noted above, FPS agreed with our 2013 recommendation to determine which guards have not had screener training and agreed to provide it to them.

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### FPS Lacks Effective Management Controls to Ensure Contract Guards Have Met Training and Certification Requirements

In our September 2013 report, we found that FPS continues to lack effective management controls to ensure that guards have met training and certification requirements. For example, although FPS agreed with our 2012 recommendation to develop a comprehensive and reliable system for contract guard oversight, it has not yet established such a system. Without a comprehensive guard management system, FPS has no independent means of ensuring that its contract guard companies have met contract requirements, such as providing qualified guards to federal facilities. Instead, FPS requires its guard companies to maintain files containing guard-training and certification information and to provide it with a monthly report containing this information. In our September 2013 report, we reported that 23 percent of the 276 guard files we reviewed (maintained by 11 of the 31 guard companies we interviewed)

lacked required training and certification documentation.<sup>12</sup> As shown in table 1, some guard files lacked documentation of basic training, semi-annual firearms qualifications, screener training, the 40-hour refresher training (required every 3 years), and CPR certification.

**Table 1: Total Missing Documents Identified in 64 of 276 Guard Files GAO Reviewed**

Requirement	Number of instances of each missing document
Copy of driver's license/State ID	1
Domestic Violence "Lautenberg" Form	1
Medical certification	1
Verified alien/immigration status	3
Current baton certification	3
Basic training	3
Firearms qualifications	3
First-aid certification	5
FPS screener training—8 hours	5
FPS orientation	8
Contractor employee fitness determination	12
CPR certification	12
AED certification	12
Refresher training	15
Pre-employment drug testing	16
Initial weapons training	17
<b>Total</b>	<b>117<sup>a</sup></b>

Source: GAO analysis of contract guard company data reported in 2013.

Note: These results are nongeneralizable and based on a review of 276 randomly selected guard files for 11 of 117 FPS guard contracts.

<sup>a</sup>Some of the files that did not comply with requirements were missing more than one document, for a total of 117 missing documents.

FPS has also identified guard files that did not contain required documentation. FPS's primary tool for ensuring that guard companies comply with contractual requirements for guards' training, certifications, and qualifications is to review guard companies' guard files monthly.

<sup>12</sup>See [GAO-13-694](#). During our nongeneralizable review of 276 randomly selected guard files, we found that 64 files (23 percent) were missing one or more required documents.

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From March 2012 through March 2013, FPS reviewed more than 23,000 guard files.<sup>13</sup> It found that a majority of the guard files had the required documentation but more than 800 (about 3 percent) did not. FPS's file reviews for that period showed files missing, for example, that documented screener training, initial weapons training, CPR certification, and firearms qualifications. However, as our September 2013 report explains, FPS's process for conducting monthly file reviews does not include requirements for reviewing and verifying the results, and we identified instances in which FPS's monthly review results did not accurately reflect the contents of guard files. For instance, FPS's review indicated that required documentation was present for some guard files, but we were not able to find documentation of training and certification, such as initial weapons training, DHS orientation, and pre-employment drug screenings.<sup>14</sup> As a result of the lack of management controls, FPS is not able to provide reasonable assurance that guards have met training and certification requirements.

DHS and FPS agreed with our 2013 recommendation to develop and implement procedures for monthly guard-file reviews to ensure consistency in selecting files and verifying the results.

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## FPS Continues to Face Challenges with Assessing Risk at Federal Facilities

We reported in 2012 that FPS is not assessing risks at federal facilities in a manner consistent with federal standards. The preliminary results of our ongoing review of risk assessments of federal facilities indicate that this is still a challenge for FPS and several other federal agencies. Federal standards such as the *National Infrastructure Protection Plan's (NIPP)* risk management framework and ISC risk assessment provisions call for a risk assessment to include threat, vulnerability, and consequence assessments. Risk assessments help decision-makers identify and evaluate security risk and implement protective measures to mitigate risk. Moreover, risk assessments play a critical role in helping agencies tailor protective measures to reflect their facilities' unique circumstances and enable them to allocate security resources effectively.

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<sup>13</sup>FPS has approximately 13,500 contract guards, but FPS may review a guard file more than once annually.

<sup>14</sup>For more information on this review and our methodology, see [GAO-13-694](#).

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Instead of conducting risk assessments, FPS uses an interim vulnerability assessment tool, referred to as the Modified Infrastructure Survey Tool (MIST), with which it assesses federal facilities until it develops a longer-term solution. According to FPS, MIST is allowing it to resume assessing federal facilities' vulnerabilities and recommend countermeasures—something FPS has not done consistently for several years. However, MIST has some limitations. Most notably, it does not assess consequence (the level, duration, and nature of potential loss resulting from an undesirable event). Three of the four risk assessment experts we spoke with generally agreed that a tool that does not estimate consequences does not allow an agency to fully assess risks. FPS officials stated that they did not include consequence information in MIST because it was not part of the original design and thus requires more time to validate. MIST also was not designed to compare risks across federal facilities. Consequently, FPS does not have the ability to take a comprehensive approach to risk management across its portfolio of 9,600 facilities and recommending countermeasures to federal tenant agencies.

As of December 2013, according to an FPS official, FPS had used MIST to complete vulnerability assessments of approximately 1,800 federal facilities and have presented approximately 1,000 of them to the facility security committees. We will continue to monitor this issue and plan to report the results early next year.

DHS agreed with our 2012 recommendations to incorporate NIPP's risk management framework in any future risk assessment tool; coordinate with federal agencies to reduce any unnecessary duplication in FPS's assessments; and address limitations with its interim tool to better assess risk at federal facilities. However, it has not yet implemented them.

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## Contact Information

For further information on this testimony, please contact Mark Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or by email at [GoldsteinM@gao.gov](mailto:GoldsteinM@gao.gov). Individuals making key contributions to this testimony include Tammy Conquest, Assistant Director; Geoff Hamilton; Bob Homan; and Sara Ann Moessbauer.

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# Related GAO Products

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*Homeland Security: Challenges Associated with Federal Protective Service's Contract Guards and Risk Assessments at Federal Facilities.* [GAO-14-128T](#). Washington, D.C.: October 30, 2013.

*Federal Protective Service: Challenges with Oversight of Contract Guard Program Still Exist, and Additional Management Controls Are Needed.* [GAO-13-694](#). Washington, D.C.: September 17, 2013.

*Facility Security: Greater Outreach by DHS on Standards and Management Practices Could Benefit Federal Agencies.* [GAO-13-222](#). Washington, D.C.: January 24, 2013.

*Federal Protective Service: Actions Needed to Assess Risk and Better Manage Contract Guards at Federal Facilities.* [GAO-12-739](#). Washington, D.C.: August 10, 2012.

*Homeland Security: Protecting Federal Facilities Remains a Challenge for the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Protective Service.* [GAO-11-813T](#). Washington, D.C.: July 13, 2011.

*Federal Facility Security: Staffing Approaches Used by Selected Agencies.* [GAO-11-601](#). Washington, D.C.: June 30, 2011.

*Homeland Security: Preliminary Observations on the Federal Protective Service's Workforce Analysis and Planning Efforts.* [GAO-10-802R](#). Washington, D.C.: June 14, 2010.

*Homeland Security: Federal Protective Service's Use of Contract Guards Requires Reassessment and More Oversight.* [GAO-10-614T](#). Washington, D.C.: April 14, 2010.

*Homeland Security: Federal Protective Service's Contract Guard Program Requires More Oversight and Reassessment of Use of Contract Guards.* [GAO-10-341](#). Washington, D.C.: April 13, 2010.

*Homeland Security: Ongoing Challenges Impact the Federal Protective Service's Ability to Protect Federal Facilities.* [GAO-10-506T](#). Washington, D.C.: March 16, 2010.

*Homeland Security: Greater Attention to Key Practices Would Improve the Federal Protective Service's Approach to Facility Protection.* [GAO-10-142](#). Washington, D.C.: October 23, 2009.

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*Homeland Security: Federal Protective Service Has Taken Some Initial Steps to Address Its Challenges, but Vulnerabilities Still Exist.*

[GAO-09-1047T](#). Washington, D.C.: September 23, 2009.

*Homeland Security: Federal Protective Service Should Improve Human Capital Planning and Better Communicate with Tenants.* [GAO-09-749](#).

Washington, D.C.: July 30, 2009.

*Homeland Security: Preliminary Results Show Federal Protective Service's Ability to Protect Federal Facilities Is Hampered by Weaknesses in Its Contract Security Guard Program.* [GAO-09-859T](#).

Washington, D.C.: July 8, 2009.

*Homeland Security: The Federal Protective Service Faces Several Challenges That Raise Concerns About Protection of Federal Facilities.*

[GAO-08-897T](#). Washington, D.C.: June 19, 2008.

*Homeland Security: The Federal Protective Service Faces Several Challenges That Raise Concerns About Protection of Federal Facilities.*

[GAO-08-914T](#). Washington, D.C.: June 18, 2008.

*Homeland Security: The Federal Protective Service Faces Several Challenges That Hamper Its Ability to Protect Federal Facilities.*

[GAO-08-683](#). Washington, D.C.: June 11, 2008.

*Homeland Security: Preliminary Observations on the Federal Protective Service's Efforts to Protect Federal Property.* [GAO-08-476T](#). Washington, D.C.: February 8, 2008.

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