

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Progress Report on Implementation of Mission and Management Functions



Highlights of GAO-07-1081T, a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) recent 4-year anniversary provides an opportunity to reflect on the progress DHS has made. The creation of DHS was one of the largest federal reorganizations in the last several decades, and GAO has reported that it was an enormous management challenge and that the size, complexity, and importance of the effort made the challenge especially daunting and critical to the nation's security. Our prior work on mergers and acquisitions has 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 our August 2007 report evaluating DHS's progress since March 2003. Specifically, it addresses DHS's progress across 14 mission and management areas and key themes that have affected DHS's implementation efforts.

How GAO Did This Study

To assess DHS's progress for the report, GAO identified performance expectations for each mission and management area based on legislation, homeland security presidential directives, DHS and component agencies' strategic plans, and other sources.

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[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-1081T](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-1081T).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Norman J. Rabkin at (202) 512-8777 or [rabkinn@gao.gov](mailto:rabkinn@gao.gov).

What GAO Found

Since its establishment in March 2003, DHS has made varying levels of progress in implementing its mission and management areas, as shown in the following table. In general, DHS has made more progress in its mission areas than in its management areas. Within its mission areas, DHS has made progress in developing plans and programs, but has faced challenges in its implementation efforts.

Table: Summary of Assessments of DHS's Progress in Mission and Management Areas

Mission/management area	Number of performance expectations	Number of expectations generally achieved	Number of expectations generally not achieved	Number of expectations not assessed	Overall assessment of progress
Border security	12	5	7	0	Modest
Immigration enforcement	16	8	4	4	Moderate
Immigration services	14	5	9	0	Modest
Aviation security	24	17	7	0	Moderate
Surface transportation security	5	3	2	0	Moderate
Maritime security	23	17	4	2	Substantial
Emergency preparedness and response	24	5	18	1	Limited
Critical infrastructure protection	7	4	3	0	Moderate
Science and technology	6	1	5	0	Limited
Acquisition management	3	1	2	0	Modest
Financial management	7	2	5	0	Modest
Human capital management	8	2	6	0	Limited
Information technology management	13	2	8	3	Limited
Real property management	9	6	3	0	Moderate
<b>Total</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>10</b>	

Source: GAO analysis.

Definitions:

**Substantial progress:** DHS has taken actions to generally achieve more than 75 percent of the identified performance expectations.

**Moderate progress:** DHS has taken actions to generally achieve more than 50 percent but 75 percent or less of the identified performance expectations.

**Modest progress:** DHS has taken actions to generally achieve more than 25 percent but 50 percent or less of the identified performance expectations.

**Limited progress:** DHS has taken actions to generally achieve 25 percent or less of the identified performance expectations.

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GAO analyzed these documents to identify responsibilities for DHS and obtained and incorporated feedback from DHS officials on the performance expectations. On the basis of GAO's and the DHS Office of Inspector General's (IG) prior work and updated information provided by DHS, GAO judged the extent to which DHS has taken actions to generally achieve each performance expectation. An assessment of generally achieved indicated that, in our view, DHS has taken actions to satisfy most elements of the expectation, and an assessment of generally not achieved indicated that, in our view, DHS has not yet taken actions to satisfy most elements of the expectation. In cases when we or the DHS IG had not completed work upon which to base an assessment or the information DHS provided did not enable us to clearly determine the extent to which DHS has achieved the performance expectation, we indicated no assessment made. Our assessment of DHS's progress relative to each performance expectation was not meant to imply that DHS should have fully achieved the performance expectation at this point. On the basis of this analysis, GAO determined whether DHS has made limited, modest, moderate, or substantial progress in each mission and management area. The assessments of progress do not reflect, nor are they intended to reflect, the extent to which DHS's actions have made the nation more secure in each area.

Key underlying themes have affected DHS's implementation efforts. These include strategies to achieve agency transformation, strategic planning and results management, risk management, information sharing, and partnerships and coordination. For example, we have 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 elements of the transformation process, such as developing a comprehensive transformation strategy. DHS also has not yet fully adopted and applied a risk management approach in implementing its mission and management functions. Some DHS component agencies have taken steps to do so, but this approach is not yet used departmentwide. In addition, DHS has taken steps to share information and coordinate with homeland security partners but has faced difficulties in these partnership efforts.

Given DHS's leading role in securing the homeland, it is critical that the department's mission and management programs operate as efficiently and effectively as possible. DHS has taken important actions to secure the border and transportation sectors and to prepare for and respond to disasters. DHS has had to undertake these missions while also working to transform itself into a fully functioning cabinet department—a difficult task for any organization. As DHS moves forward, it will be important for the department to continue to develop more measurable goals to guide implementation efforts and to enable better accountability. It will also be important for DHS to continually reassess its mission and management goals, measures, and milestones to evaluate progress made, identify past and emerging obstacles, and examine alternatives to effectively address those obstacles.

### **What GAO Recommends**

While this testimony contains no new recommendations, GAO has made approximately 700 recommendations to DHS. DHS has implemented some of these recommendations and taken actions to address others. However, we have reported that the department still has much to do to ensure that it conducts its missions efficiently and effectively while it simultaneously prepares to address future challenges that face the department and the nation.

In commenting on a draft of our report, DHS raised some concerns regarding aspects of our methodology, including the criteria used and consistent application of the criteria. We believe that we have fully disclosed and consistently applied the methodology in our report and that it provides a sound basis for our progress report. DHS also disagreed with our assessment for 42 of the 171 performance expectations. Our report provides a detailed response to DHS's comments on the 42 expectations. Overall, we appreciate DHS's concerns and recognize that in such a broad-based endeavor, some level of disagreement is inevitable, especially at any given point in time. However, we have been as transparent as possible regarding our purpose, methodology, and professional judgments.