What GAO Found

FEMA faces challenges measuring performance for Citizen Corps, partner programs, and the Ready Campaign because it does not have a process to verify that data for its principal performance measure—the registered number of established volunteer organizations across the country—are accurate and the Ready Campaign is not positioned to control the distribution of its message or measure whether its message is changing individuals’ behavior. FEMA faces challenges ensuring that the information needed to measure the number of established, active volunteer units is accurate. For example, officials representing 17 councils GAO contacted during its site visits stated that 12 were active and 5 were not. FEMA officials said that the new online registration process FEMA plans to adopt in 2010 will result in some programs being removed from FEMA’s registries. They said that FEMA expects to use the new process to collect more comprehensive data on membership and council activities. FEMA counts requests for literature, Web site hits, and the number of television or radio announcements made to gauge performance for the Ready Campaign, but FEMA does not control when its message is viewed because it relies on donated media, such as air time for television and radio announcements. Because changes in behavior can result from a variety of factors, including other campaigns, it is difficult to measure the campaign’s effect on changes in individuals’ behavior.

FEMA’s challenges measuring the performance of community preparedness programs is compounded by the fact that it has not developed a strategy to encompass how Citizen Corps, its partner programs, and the Ready Campaign are to operate within the context of the NPS. In April 2009, GAO reported that FEMA’s National Preparedness Directorate (NPD), which is responsible for community preparedness, had not developed a strategic plan. GAO reported that instead of a strategic plan, NPD officials stated that they used a draft annual operating plan and Post-Katrina Act provisions to guide NPD’s efforts. However, the plan’s objectives do not include key elements of a strategy, such as how NPD will measure its progress meeting goals and objectives or the potential costs and types of resources and investments needed. GAO recommended that NPD develop a strategic plan to implement the NPS that contains these key elements. GAO concurred with GAO’s recommendation and told GAO that it is taking actions to strengthen strategic planning. FEMA officials stated that they are reviewing implementation plans and policy documents, such as the National Preparedness Guidelines, and that community preparedness is a key element being considered in this process. FEMA has not set a date for completion of the National Preparedness System strategy, and the extent to which Citizen Corps, its partner programs, or the Ready Campaign will be included in the final strategy is not clear. GAO will continue to assess FEMA’s efforts related to community preparedness programs as part of its ongoing work. FEMA provided technical comments on a draft of this testimony, which GAO incorporated as appropriate.