HOMELAND SECURITY

Federal Protective Service Could Better Measure the Performance of Its Control Centers

What GAO Found

FPS MegaCenters provide three primary security services—alarm monitoring, radio monitoring, and dispatching of FPS police officers and contract guards. These and other services are provided around the clock from four locations—Battle Creek, Michigan; Denver, Colorado; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Suitland, Maryland. With a fiscal year 2006 budget of $23.5 million, the MegaCenters monitor alarms at over 8,300 federal facilities, covering almost 381 million square feet, and have available for dispatch over 7,800 FPS police officers and contract guards.

The MegaCenter Emergency Response Process

FPS MegaCenter managers assess MegaCenter operations through a variety of means, including reviewing data about volume and timeliness of operations, listening to and evaluating a sample of calls between operators and FPS police officers and contract guards, and receiving informal feedback about customer satisfaction. FPS managers have also developed performance measures for assessing MegaCenter operations. However, these measures are of limited use because they are not always clearly stated or measurable and do not address governmentwide priorities of efficiency, cost of service, and outcome—which are among the attributes that GAO has identified for successful performance measures. In addition, the MegaCenters do not measure a key activity—the time from alarm to officer dispatch—that would link MegaCenter performance to an FPS-wide performance measure of response time. Without a corresponding measure, FPS is limited in its ability to evaluate the MegaCenters’ contribution to the FPS-wide measure of response time.

Nine selected security organizations—including federal and local police and private entities—offer some of the MegaCenters’ services as well as provide and assess these services in a manner that is generally similar to the MegaCenters. Like the MegaCenters, many of the selected organizations have centralized their operations. They also use regular call reviews and volume and time measures to assess the quality of the services they provide. A major difference between the MegaCenters and some selected organizations is the use of a computer-aided dispatch system, which enables these organizations to automate many functions.