



Highlights of [GAO-07-455](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

A key challenge in securing our homeland is ensuring that critical information collected by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) is shared in a timely manner with federal, state, and local governments and the private sector. It is important that federal networks and associated systems, applications, and data facilitate this vital information sharing. GAO was asked to (1) identify DHS and DOJ networks and Internet-based system applications that support homeland security and (2) determine whether DHS efforts associated with its Homeland Security Information Network are being coordinated with key state and local information-sharing initiatives. GAO assessed the coordination between DHS and two key state and local initiatives of the Regional Information Sharing System program.

What GAO Recommends

To improve coordination with state and local information sharing efforts and avoid duplication, GAO is recommending, among other things, that DHS inventory key state and local initiatives, implement coordination and collaboration practices, and ensure its efforts are consistent with the Administration's information-sharing initiative. In its written comments, DHS concurred with the above recommendations and noted actions it is taking to implement them.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-455.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Numerous Federal Networks Used to Support Homeland Security Need to Be Better Coordinated with Key State and Local Information Sharing Initiatives

What GAO Found

The Departments of Homeland Security and Justice have 17 major networks that support their homeland security missions, including sharing information with state and local governments. Examples include DHS's Homeland Secure Data Network and DOJ's Justice Consolidated Network. The departments also have four system applications that use the Internet. Among the four are DHS's Homeland Security Information Network—the department's primary information technology system for sharing terrorism and related information—and DOJ's Law Enforcement Online. While some networks and applications are used solely within their respective departments, others are used both within the department and by other federal, state, and local agencies and the private sector. For example, of the 17 networks, 9 are used only within their own department, and 8 are used within the department and by other federal, state, and local agencies. The reported cost to develop, operate, and maintain these networks and applications in fiscal years 2005 and 2006 was \$893.1 million.

DHS is statutorily responsible for coordinating the federal government's networks and related systems with state and local governments. Federal guidance directs DHS to foster such coordination and collaboration as a means to enhance information sharing and avoid duplicative efforts. Key practices to help implement the guidance include establishing joint strategies and compatible policies and procedures to operate across agency boundaries. However, DHS did not fully adhere to these practices in coordinating efforts on its Homeland Security Information Network with key state and local information-sharing initiatives. For example, it did not work with the two key state and local information-sharing initiatives (of the Regional Information Sharing System program) to fully develop joint strategies to meet mutual needs. It also did not develop compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across organizational boundaries. DHS's limited use of these practices is attributable in part to the department's expediting its schedule to deploy information-sharing capabilities after September 11, 2001, and in doing so not developing an inventory of key state and local information-sharing initiatives.

DHS officials have efforts planned and under way to improve coordination and collaboration, including establishing an advisory committee to obtain state and local views on network operations. DHS also plans to coordinate its efforts with the Administration's Information Sharing Environment initiative that aims to improve information sharing among all levels of government and the private sector. However, these activities have either just begun or are being planned. Consequently, until DHS develops an inventory of key state and local initiatives and fully implements coordination and collaboration practices, it is at risk that effective information sharing is not occurring and that its Homeland Security Information Network may be duplicating state and local capabilities. This also raises the issue of whether similar coordination and duplication issues exist with the other homeland security networks, systems, and applications under DHS's purview.