



Highlights of [GAO-08-41](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Continued financial challenges and increased competition call for the U.S. Postal Service to manage its 34,000 facilities as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible. GAO and others have identified key facility management challenges, including the need to (1) capture and maintain accurate facility data, (2) adequately maintain facilities, and (3) align retail access with customer needs. This report assesses Postal Service efforts to overcome these challenges and implement leading federal practices. To conduct this study, GAO analyzed postal data and documents, visited 58 facilities, and interviewed postal officials.

What GAO Recommends

To improve facility management, GAO recommends that the Postal Service consider whether it is more cost-effective to make its Facility Database reliable or to replace it. If the Postal Service chooses to retain the database, GAO recommends that it establish internal controls, measure facility management performance, and track trends. GAO also recommends better prioritization of maintenance projects and initiating a criteria-based approach to assist in identifying and closing unneeded retail facilities consistent with leading federal practices. In its comments, the Postal Service chose to retain the database and establish controls but not to track performance or trends. It agreed in principle to prioritize maintenance but not to initiate a criteria-based approach to identify and close unneeded retail facilities.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-41](#). For more information, contact Katherine A. Siggerud at (202) 512-2834 or siggerudk@gao.gov.

U.S. POSTAL SERVICE FACILITIES

Improvements in Data Would Strengthen Maintenance and Alignment of Access to Retail Services

What GAO Found

To address the challenge of capturing and maintaining accurate facility management data, the Postal Service developed the Facility Database, but the database does not conform to the Postal Service's goals or to leading federal practices; specifically, it does not include data needed to measure performance on managing facilities or have the capacity to track such data over time. Further, a database analysis by GAO revealed data reliability problems, including duplicative and contradictory data. In addition, major Postal Service departments do not use the database as a consolidated data source for managing postal facilities. The Postal Service has attempted to improve the database, but many problems remain.

To address the challenge of maintaining its facilities, the Postal Service has begun assessing the condition of the facilities but has neither determined the extent of its maintenance projects nor strategically prioritized the projects. A Postal Service inspection of 651 randomly selected postal facilities revealed that two-thirds were in less than "acceptable" condition, but the Postal Service had not documented the full extent of its maintenance projects backlog. After the inspection, the Postal Service initiated a program to assess the condition of all of its facilities—a necessary first step to improving their condition. In addition, the Postal Service lacks the data needed to implement leading federal practices, such as considering a facility's importance and value when prioritizing its maintenance projects. Due to funding constraints, the Postal Service currently focuses exclusively on emergency and urgent repairs—at the expense of a less costly preventive maintenance approach.

To address the challenge of aligning access to postal retail services with customer needs, the Postal Service has expanded access in underserved areas but has done less to address overserved areas. Leading federal practices identify criteria for "rightsizing" facility networks—such as considering facilities' importance and utilization—but the Postal Service does not consider these criteria. GAO's analysis shows wide variation in the number of postal retail facilities among comparable counties, and a number of facilities GAO visited appeared to merit consideration for closure based on one or more of the federal criteria. If the Postal Service begins collecting data that reflects criteria based on leading federal practices, it may be able to close facilities and adjust access to retail services according to customer needs.