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# Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-09-93](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

Covering nearly 4,000 miles of land and water from Washington to Maine, the U.S.-Canadian border is the longest undefended border in the world. Various Department of Homeland Security (DHS) component agencies share responsibility for northern border security, primarily U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP), in collaboration with other federal, state, local, tribal, and Canadian entities. The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Act of 2007 required the Secretary of Homeland Security to submit a report to Congress that addresses the vulnerabilities along the northern border, and provides recommendations and required resources to address them. The act also required GAO to review and comment on this report. In response to this mandate, GAO examined (1) the extent to which the DHS report to Congress is responsive to the legislative requirements and (2) actions that may be necessary to address northern border vulnerabilities in addition to the actions addressed in the report. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed DHS plans, reports, and other documents, and interviewed DHS officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Homeland Security provide more specific information in future reports on actions and resources needed to achieve northern border security, and in what time frame they are needed. DHS and CBP concurred with our recommendation.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-93](#). For more information, contact Richard Stanar at (202) 512-8777 or stanar@gao.gov.

## NORTHERN BORDER SECURITY

### DHS's Report Could Better Inform Congress by Identifying Actions, Resources, and Time Frames Needed to Address Vulnerabilities

#### What GAO Found

The DHS February 2008 report to Congress is not fully responsive to legislative requirements in providing information for improving northern border security. In particular, DHS provided a listing of northern border vulnerabilities and initiatives to address them, but did not include recommendations and additional resources that are needed to protect the northern border. DHS officials provided several reasons for the lack of specificity and gaps in reported information, including the fact that the component agencies' priorities for action and resources are reflected in the existing budget process, and that they had nothing further to recommend or request through this report. However, budget documents do not reflect the resources needed over time to achieve control of the northern border. The lack of this information makes it difficult for Congress to consider future actions and resources needed.

DHS is developing northern border strategic plans and a risk-management process to help guide and prioritize action and resources, and fully implementing recommendations from past GAO evaluations would also provide benefit in addressing northern border security vulnerabilities. DHS is currently developing strategic plans that are intended to provide overall direction in addressing vulnerabilities in northern border security. DHS is also developing a risk-management process to assist in prioritizing efforts and resources that will provide greatest benefit to national security. DHS officials have said that the success of various pilot projects, such as DHS's testing of new technology, will likely change the level and mix of resources needed to protect the northern border. In the meantime, DHS could take action to reduce vulnerabilities by implementing recommendations made in past evaluations. DHS has implemented 11 GAO recommendations designed to improve border security, but 39 recommendations are yet to be fully addressed. Eighteen of these open recommendations were made within the last year. However, 21 recommendations for improving use of air and marine assets, improving screening processes at the ports of entry, and deploying nuclear detection equipment—which DHS and other agencies generally agreed to take action to implement—have remained open for at least 1 year and, in some cases, over 3 years. GAO believes these outstanding recommendations continue to have merit and should be implemented.

#### Vehicle Inspections and Agent Patrols at and between Northern Border Ports of Entry



Source: GAO.

Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection.