Why GAO Did This Study
The 2001 anthrax attacks in the United States highlighted the need to develop response plans and capabilities to protect U.S. citizens from chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) agents. Since 2004, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has spent at least $70 million developing more than 20 CBRN risk assessments. GAO was requested to assess, from fiscal year 2004 to the present, the extent to which DHS has used its CBRN risk assessments to inform CBRN response plans and CBRN capabilities, and has institutionalized their use. GAO examined relevant laws, Homeland Security Presidential Directives, an Executive Order, DHS guidance, and all 12 relevant interagency CBRN response plans developed by DHS. Based on a review of a United States governmentwide CBRN database and DHS interviews, among other things, GAO selected a nongeneralizable set of seven DHS capabilities used specifically for detecting or responding to CBRN incidents to identify examples of DHS’s use of its CBRN risk assessments. GAO also interviewed relevant DHS officials. This is a public version of a classified report that GAO issued in October 2011. Information DHS deemed sensitive or classified has been redacted.

What GAO Found
Since 2004, DHS’s use of its CBRN risk assessments to inform its CBRN response plans has varied, from directly influencing information in the plans to not being used at all. DHS guidance states that response planning and resource decisions should be informed by risk information. GAO’s analysis showed that DHS used its CBRN risk assessments to directly inform 2 of 12 CBRN response plans. DHS agreed with the recommendation. GAO also interviewed relevant DHS officials. This is a public version of a classified report that GAO issued in October 2011. Information DHS deemed sensitive or classified has been redacted.

What GAO Recommends
GAO recommends that DHS develop more specific guidance, including written procedures, that details when and how DHS components should consider using the department’s CBRN risk assessments to inform related response planning efforts and capability investment decision making. DHS agreed with the recommendation.

View GAO-12-272. For more information, contact William O. Jenkins, Jr. at (202) 512-8777 or jenkinswo@gao.gov.