

Highlights of [GAO-12-512T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

In 2009, President Obama announced an international initiative to secure all vulnerable nuclear material worldwide within 4 years. Leaders of 47 nations endorsed this effort at the 2010 Nuclear Security Summit and will meet again in March 2012 to evaluate their work and set new goals for nuclear security. The United States has been a leader in promoting nuclear nonproliferation efforts worldwide. GAO has issued numerous reports on U.S. nonproliferation programs administered by several agencies, including the departments of Energy (DOE), State, and Defense (DOD); and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). This testimony, which is based primarily on previously issued reports, discusses (1) the U.S. strategy to secure all vulnerable nuclear material within 4 years, (2) U.S. agencies' ability to track and evaluate the security of U.S. nuclear materials transferred to foreign countries, (3) challenges coordinating federal nuclear nonproliferation efforts, and (4) preliminary observations regarding GAO's ongoing work on federal efforts to secure radiological sources in U.S. hospitals and medical facilities. To conduct its ongoing work, GAO visited 25 hospitals and medical facilities in 7 states and the District of Columbia.

GAO is making no new recommendations, but continues to believe that implementation of the recommendations made in its recent reports complements and supports the administration's goal of securing vulnerable nuclear material in a timely fashion.

View [GAO-12-512T](#) or key components. For more information, contact Gene Aloise at (202) 512-3841 or [aloisee@gao.gov](mailto:aloisee@gao.gov).

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## NUCLEAR NONPROLIFERATION

### Further Actions Needed by U.S. Agencies to Secure Vulnerable Nuclear and Radiological Materials

#### What GAO Found

The President's 4-year initiative is a worthwhile effort designed to accelerate U.S. and international efforts to secure nuclear material worldwide. However, as GAO reported in December 2010, the governmentwide strategy approved by the National Security Council (NSC) for the initiative lacked specific details regarding how the initiative will be implemented. As a result, key details associated with the initiative are unclear, including its overall estimated cost, time frame for completion of work, and scope of planned work. In its 2010 report, GAO recommended, among other things, that NSC lead the interagency development of a more detailed implementation plan for the President's 4-year initiative. NSC did not comment on GAO's recommendations.

The United States also faces challenges accounting for and evaluating the security of U.S. nuclear material overseas. As GAO reported in September 2011, federal agencies are not able to fully account for U.S. nuclear material overseas that is subject to nuclear cooperation agreements. GAO also found that the agreements do not contain specific access rights that enable agencies to monitor and evaluate the physical security of U.S. nuclear material overseas. GAO found that the agencies responsible for reviewing foreign partners' security are not doing so systematically. GAO suggested that Congress consider directing DOE and NRC to fully account for U.S. weapon-usable nuclear materials overseas and consider amending the Atomic Energy Act to require access rights allowing the United States to verify adequate protection of U.S. nuclear materials if future agreements cannot be negotiated to include such rights.

GAO also reported in December 2011 on the challenges in coordinating U.S. governmentwide nonproliferation efforts. Specifically, GAO identified potential fragmentation and overlap among some U.S. programs that played a role in preventing and detecting the smuggling of nuclear materials overseas. GAO also found that no single federal agency had the lead responsibility to direct these efforts. GAO recommended, among other things, that NSC review U.S. programs working to prevent nuclear smuggling overseas to reduce fragmentation and potential overlap. NSC declined to comment on the recommendations.

In addition to nuclear materials, the Summit plans to address the security of radiological sources—material that could be used to make a dirty bomb. Based on preliminary results from ongoing work on federal efforts to secure radiological sources in U.S. hospitals and medical facilities, GAO found that NRC's security controls for hospitals and medical facilities do not prescribe the specific steps that must be taken to protect their radiological sources. GAO also found that medical facilities have implemented the controls in various ways. This has created a mix of security measures at the locations GAO visited that could leave some facilities more vulnerable than others. DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has established a voluntary program to upgrade the security of domestic facilities that have radiological sources. NNSA has made progress in securing domestic radiological sources, but some facilities have declined NNSA's assistance, including hospitals located in high-risk urban areas.