GAO

Information for the Committee on Homeland Security and the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency

Facility Security: Federal Protective Service's and Selected Federal Tenants' Sharing of and Response to Incident Information

Accessible Version

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Introduction

- The April 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City; the February 2012 shooting at the Anderson Federal Building in Long Beach, California; and the September 2013 Navy Yard shootings in Washington, D.C., demonstrate the continued vulnerability of federal facilities to security incidents.
- The security of federal government facilities affects not only the daily operations of the federal government but also the health, well-being, and safety of federal employees and the public.
- The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Federal Protective Service (FPS) is responsible for protecting almost 9,000 federal facilities held or leased by the General Services Administration (GSA). FPS protects these facilities by, among other things, sharing and responding to incident information. Federal tenants that occupy GSA-held or leased space also have a role in facility protection.

Objectives

The objectives of our review were to describe

(1) how FPS and selected federal tenants identify and share information they receive on security incidents;

(2) the actions, if any, FPS and selected federal tenants take to respond to incident information, and the factors that guide their responses; and

(3) the challenges, if any, FPS and selected federal tenants face related to sharing and responding to incident information.

Scope and Methodology

- This review focuses on incidents that have occurred and imminent incidents at FPS-protected federal facilities. An incident is an event that affects the safety, security, or protection of property, a facility, or occupants and requires a response, investigation, or follow-up by FPS.
- We reviewed regulations regarding FPS's and federal tenants' requirements to share and respond to incident information, and GAO and DHS reports on FPS and federal facility security practices.
- We reviewed documentation and interviewed officials from FPS and GSA headquarters offices and FPS regional offices. We also interviewed FPS and federal tenant officials who are responsible for security at four FPS-protected facilities in two of 11 FPS regions, Regions 4 (Southeast Region) and 11 (National Capital Region).
  - We selected the Southeast Region because its federal facilities are more dispersed across a larger geographic area, and selected the National Capital Region because of its high concentration of federal facilities within a small geographic area.
  - To select the four facilities, we first identified a subset of facilities in each region through random selection and then selected four facilities from the subsets based on several facility characteristics (GSA-held or leased, security level, urban location, single or multi-tenant facility). Two of our four facilities are occupied by multiple federal tenants. One facility has two federal tenants, both of whom we selected for our review. The other facility has approximately 20 federal tenants. We selected two tenants whose work requires interaction with the public and to capture variation in the amount of occupied square footage.
  - Given the small number of facilities and federal tenants we selected, the information obtained from FPS and selected federal tenants about the sharing of and response to incident information and challenges is not generalizable to all FPS-protected facilities and their tenants.

Scope and Methodology
Table 1: Characteristics of Selected Federal Facilities

Facility	FPS region	GSA-held or leased	Security level [a]	Urban or non-urban location	Single tenant or multi-tenant facility	Number of federal tenants interviewed	Number of incidents in 2014 reported by FPS [b]
Facility 1	Region 4	GSA-leased	Level 4	Urban	Single tenant	1	48
Facility 2	Region 4	GSA-held	Level 4	Urban	Multi-tenant (approximately 20 federal tenants)	2	48
Facility 3	Region 11	GSA-held	Level 3	Urban	Single tenant	1	20
Facility 4	Region 11	GSA-leased	Level 4	Urban	Multi-tenant (2 federal tenants as well as private sector tenants)	2	18

Source: GAO and GAO summary of GSA and FPS data. I GAO-15-406R

[a] Non-military federal facilities are assigned a facility security level (FSL) of 1 to 5. A higher-numbered FSL facility would be considered a higher security risk than a lower-numbered FSL facility.

[b] In 2014, FPS reported a total of 2068 incidents in region 4 and 3043 incidents in region 11.

Background: Types of Incidents that May Occur at Federal Facilities

Federal facilities and those who work in and visit them can face a variety of security incidents including:

- Demonstrations, which could increase security risks
- Verbal, physical, and sexual threats against employees
- Unruly or disgruntled individuals
- Bombings or possession of weapons and explosive devices
- Robbery
- Homicide
- Arson

Background: FPS's Roles and Responsibilities for Sharing and Responding to Incident Information

FPS regional offices, Protective Security Officers (PSO), and MegaCenters are responsible for sharing and responding to incident information:

- FPS regional offices: FPS has 11 regional offices across the country. Each region has a workforce that generally consists of a regional director, inspectors, regional intelligence agents, and other officials. Some of these officials are responsible for sharing and responding to incident information at federal facilities in their region.

- FPS PSOs: PSOs, who are contracted by FPS, are responsible for, among other things, responding to emergency situations at some federal facilities. In February 2015, FPS reported that it had approximately 13,500 PSOs. According to FPS, the PSOs' contract requires that they provide FPS with information on incidents, emergencies, and offenses occurring at the facility where they are located.

- FPS MegaCenters: FPS provides support for its law enforcement and security services through four regional communications centers known as MegaCenters. The MegaCenters are located in Colorado, Maryland, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. MegaCenters dispatch FPS law enforcement officials or PSOs, or both to federal facilities in the event of an incident.

Background
Table 2: Other Entities that Protect Federal Facilities

Although FPS is the primary federal agency responsible for protecting GSA-held or leased facilities, other federal law enforcement agencies and federal tenants also have roles.

Agency	Roles and responsibilities
Federal law enforcement agencies other than FPS	Federal law enforcement agencies other than FPS have responsibilities for facility security. For example, the U.S. Marshals Service is responsible for the interior security of court space, and the U.S. Capitol Police's responsibilities include the security of congressional facilities.
Federal tenant agencies	Federal agencies can have individuals who are responsible for the physical security for all of their facilities nationwide. Individual tenants in federal facilities may also have officials who are responsible for physical security at their particular facility. According to FPS, federal agencies generally do not have law enforcement authority and do not conduct investigations. If there is more than one federal tenant at a facility, a Facility Security Committee (FSC) is established to make security decisions for the facility. Each FSC consists of representatives from each of the tenant agencies in the facility. An FSC Chairperson, who is a representative from the primary tenant in the facility, leads the FSC.

Source: GAO analysis of information from GAO, the Congressional Research Service, DHS, and federal tenants. I GAO-15-406R

Background

Table 3: Selected Regulations Related to the Sharing of and Response to Incident Information at Federal Facilities

In general, FPS and federal tenants are required to share specified types of information, and FPS is required to respond to information about incidents against federal facilities. These requirements do not describe the actions that FPS or federal tenants should take to share or respond to incident information.

Regulations	Description
41 C.F.R. § 102-85.35	General requirement for FPS to share intelligence information and respond to law enforcement needs including terrorist threats and civil disturbances as part of its services for basic security fees.
41 C.F.R. § 102-74.15	Requirement for federal tenants to share information about crimes and suspicious activity with the FPS region and, as appropriate, local law enforcement.
41 C.F.R. §§ 102-74.230-250	Requirement for the primary federal tenant occupying a facility to develop, implement, and maintain a facility Occupant Emergency Plan (OEP), and to provide for staffing and training related to the OEP. In addition, the regulations contain a list of factors that the primary federal tenant must consider when deciding whether to initiate the emergency procedures in the OEP. All tenants in a facility should follow procedures established in a facility's OEP.

Source: GAO analysis of selected regulations. I GAO-15-406R

Objective 1: Identifying and Sharing Incident Information

Bottom line: FPS and selected federal tenants we interviewed identify incident information through formal and informal sources and may take different steps to share incident information depending on whether an incident has occurred and the urgency of response needed.

Table 4: Examples of Formal Sources FPS and Federal Tenants Can Use to Identify Incident Information

FPS and federal tenant officials we interviewed said that they can identify incident information from a variety of formal sources, as described below. In some cases, FPS and federal tenant officials learn about incidents through emails. In other cases, FPS and federal tenants learn about incident information by participating in multi-agency efforts or conducting research.

How officials learn about incident information	Source	Description of formal source
Receive emails	Information products	Information products, such as FPS alerts that provide information on suspicious individuals in the area, are produced by FPS. These products, many of which are law enforcement sensitive or for official use only, may be shared with FPS regional officials, PSOs, and federal tenants.
	Email distribution lists	FPS and federal tenants receive information about incidents and facility protection efforts from email distribution lists.
Participate in multi-agency efforts	Fusion centers	Fusion centers are focal points within the state and local environment for the receipt, analysis, gathering, and sharing of incident-related information among various government organizations. FPS and federal tenant officials receive threat information from the fusion centers.
	Facility Security Committee (FSC)	If there are multiple federal tenants at a facility, an FSC is established to make security decisions for the facility. FSC representatives assist in the flow of information between their respective headquarters and the FSC.
	Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF)	JTTFs, which are funded and managed by the Department of Justice's Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), aim to prevent, preempt, deter, and investigate terrorism and related activities. FPS regional officials we interviewed said that FPS officials are assigned to JTTFs and share information about incidents with FPS colleagues as needed and as authorized.
Conduct research	Federal government portals	The federal government maintains several portals for sharing incident information. For example, FPS and federal tenant officials we interviewed said that they search the Homeland Security Information Network (HSIN), which is a DHS-maintained portal of sensitive but unclassified information on topics such as law enforcement, emergency management, and intelligence.

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by FPS and selected federal tenants. I GAO-15-406R

Table 5: Examples of Informal Sources FPS and Federal Tenants Can Use to Identify Incident Information

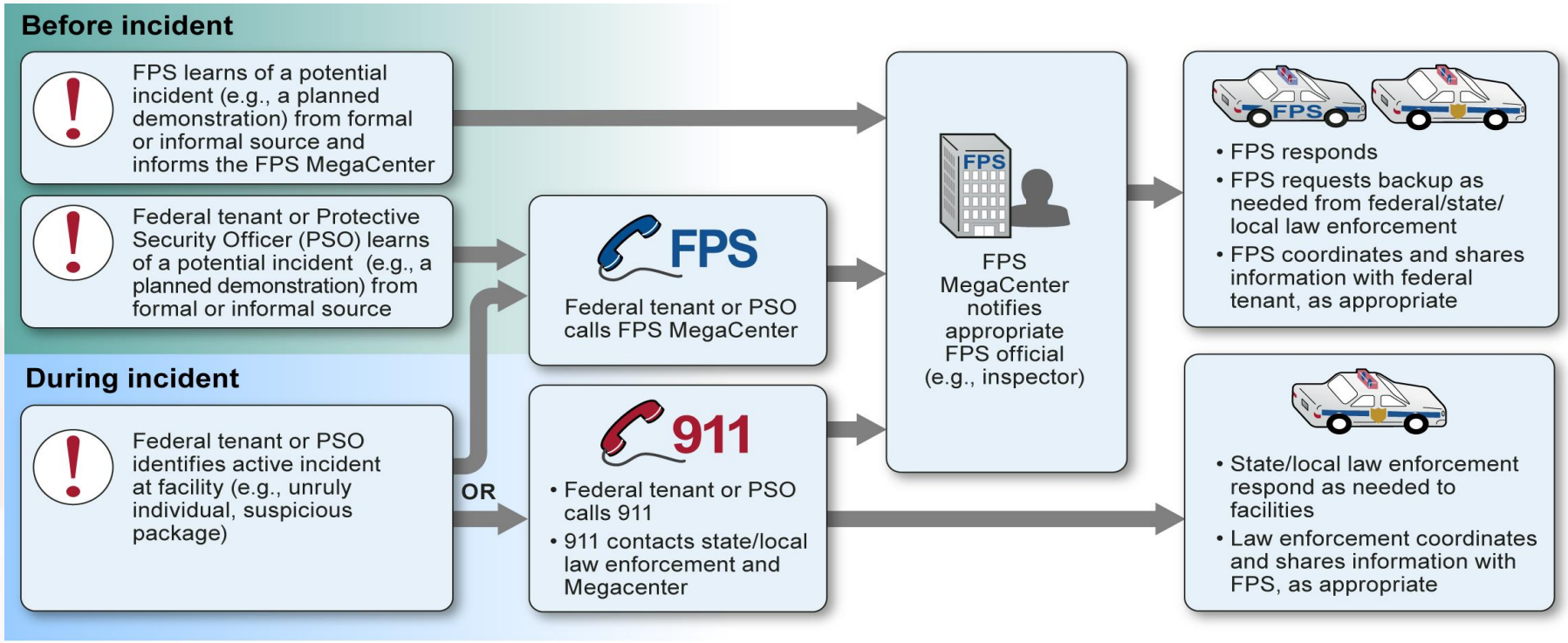
FPS and federal tenant officials we interviewed said that they can identify incident information from informal sources, as described below.

Source	Description of informal source
News media	FPS and federal tenant officials said that news media outlets, such as CNN, can offer real-time information about an incident.
Social media	Federal tenant officials said that they are able to access social media (e.g., Twitter and Facebook) to identify incident information. FPS has a policy that allows staff to apply for permission to use social media on government devices for specific investigations and law enforcement activities.
Professional relationships	FPS and federal tenant officials said that they can leverage professional relationships with, for example, former security colleagues to acquire incident information.

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by FPS and selected federal tenants. I GAO-15-406R

Figure 1: FPS's and Federal Tenants' Sharing of Incident Information

FPS and federal tenants may take different steps to share incident information depending on whether an incident has occurred and the urgency of response needed. For example, if an incident occurs at an FPS-protected facility, federal tenants are instructed to share incident information with FPS MegaCenters. Federal tenants may also contact local law enforcement directly. One federal tenant official said that he would contact local law enforcement if the incident requires immediate response or if FPS cannot respond quickly due to geographic limitations. In addition, federal tenant officials in a multi-tenant facility said that GSA facilitates the dissemination of incident information among tenants in the facility.



Source: GAO. | GAO-15-406R

Objective 2: Response to Incident Information and Factors that Guide Response

Bottom line: The actions FPS and selected federal tenants take to respond to incident information varies depending on factors such as FPS or agency guidelines, characteristics of incidents and facilities, and professional judgment.

Factors that Guide Response to Incident Information

FPS and federal tenant officials we interviewed generally identified four types of factors that guide their response to incident information:

- Guidelines, procedures, or plans
- Characteristics of incidents
- Characteristics of facilities
- Professional judgment, past experiences, and training

Table 6: Factors that Guide Response to Incident Information

Factor	Details
Guidelines, procedures, or plans	FPS, federal tenant, and GSA officials we interviewed said that guidelines, procedures, or plans play a role in guiding FPS's and federal tenants' response actions. • **FPS officials**. FPS has developed guidelines and procedures that inform FPS officials, such as inspectors, on how they should respond to specific incidents. For example, FPS's Protective Investigations Guidelines describe the actions FPS officials should take if a threat is made against a federal employee or facility. • **FPS PSOs**. FPS PSO responsibilities are documented in Post Orders. These Orders outline PSOs' duties and responsibilities at each post within the facility, including the actions they should take to respond to certain incidents. • **Federal tenants**. Federal tenants have a variety of agency-specific plans that guide their response. For example, tenants have Occupant Emergency Plans, which describe the actions that they should take to respond to emergencies.

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by FPS, selected federal tenants, and GSA. I GAO-15-406R

Table 7: Factors that Guide Response to Incident Information

Factor	Details
Characteristics of incidents	FPS, federal tenant, and GSA officials we interviewed said that various characteristics of an incident guide FPS's and federal tenants' response actions, such as: • **Type of incident** (e.g., threats against a facility or employee; disgruntled individuals; demonstrations, which could increase security risks; suspicious packages) • **Urgency of incident** (e.g., whether incident has occurred, is imminent, or will occur in the future) • **Background on incident** (e.g., what has happened already, who is involved) • **Size or complexity of incident** (e.g., whether the incident impacts facilities nationwide or is specific to a single facility, complexity of the situation, potential impact of incident) • **Credibility or relevance of the incident** (e.g., whether incident is relevant to federal tenants)

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by FPS, selected federal tenants, and GSA. I GAO-15-406R

Table 8: Factors that Guide Response to Incident Information

Factor	Details
Characteristics of facilities	FPS, federal tenant, and GSA officials we interviewed said that various facility characteristics, such as those listed below, inform FPS's and federal tenants' response: • **Size of a facility** (e.g., number of stories, number of agencies (single tenant vs. multi-tenant)) • **Number of employees in a facility** • **Layout and security personnel at a facility** (e.g., where exits are located, number and involvement of security personnel) • **Federal tenants that occupy a facility** (e.g., tenants—such as courts, the Internal Revenue Service, the Social Security Administration—whose mission and work make them the focus of threats from certain groups or individuals) • **Location of facility** (e.g., near other federal facilities, located in urban or non-urban areas) • **Unique facility characteristics** (e.g., existence of a child care center or private sector tenants, whether facility is a target for those who want to do harm)

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by FPS, selected federal tenants, and GSA. I GAO-15-406R

Table 9: Factors that Guide Response to Incident Information

Factor	Details
Professional judgment, past experiences, training	FPS and federal tenant officials we interviewed said that they use their professional judgment, past experiences, and training to inform how they will respond to incidents. • FPS officials told us that FPS officials (e.g., inspectors), PSOs, and federal tenants receive training on how to handle incidents such as suspicious packages and active shooter situations.[1] • An FPS inspector said that a lot of demonstrations are held in proximity to federal facilities in the region and that the knowledge he gains from these demonstrations helps inform how he responds to future demonstrations.

Source: GAO analysis of information provided by FPS and selected federal tenants. I GAO-15-406R

[1] In September 2013, we found that FPS had not provided training to some PSOs on how to use screening equipment (i.e., x-rays and magnetometers) and that some PSOs had not received training on how to respond to active shooter situations. We recommended, among other things, that FPS take immediate steps to provide such training to PSOs who had not received it. FPS agreed with the recommendation and stated that it has begun taking steps to ensure that PSO training is completed. See GAO, *Federal Protective Service: Challenges with Oversight of Contract Guard Program Still Exist, and Additional Management Controls Are Needed*, GAO-13-694 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 17, 2013).

Example of Response Action: Threat Against Federal Employee or Facility

FPS response: According to FPS's Protective Investigations Guidelines, FPS inspectors and other regional officials should take various actions, some of which are listed below, if they are informed that an individual has made a threat against a federal employee or facility.

Figure 2: Selected Actions FPS Officials Should Take if a Threat is Made Against a Federal Employee or Facility

Evaluate Threat

- Review reports about the threat.
- Obtain information from the victim and others about the threat such as who made the threat and the specific wording of the threat.
- Conduct background check and other research about individual who made the threat.
- Evaluate the motive and intent of the individual who made the threat and his/her ability to carry out the threat.
- Interview individual who made the threat, if appropriate.

Notify appropriate agencies

- Depending on the threat, the FPS official may need to inform various agencies about the threat, such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation or a federal tenant's Office of Security.
- An FPS Regional Director we interviewed said that he would also notify other FPS regions as needed.

Determine whether further action is needed

- Potential action: Issue trespass notice or letter.
- Potential action: Based on the findings of the investigation, prepare prosecution report and present the report to the U.S. Attorney's Office or a state prosecutor's office for prosecution determination.
- Potential action: FPS Regional Directors we interviewed said that if circumstances warrant, they may issue cease and desist orders.

Source: GAO summary of FPS's Protective Investigations Guidelines and information provided by FPS officials. I GAO-15-406R

Federal tenant response: FPS instructs federal tenants to respond to such incidents by calling FPS's MegaCenter, but one federal tenant official said that if the individual were likely to immediately carry out the threat, he would contact local law enforcement and later inform FPS.

Example of Response Action: Demonstrations at or near Federal Facilities

FPS Response:

- FPS's Standardized Operational Planning Process directive describes the processes FPS officials follow to plan for critical incidents and special events, such as demonstrations. The directive guides FPS officials to identify, for example, how FPS will use available resources for a particular critical incident or special event and coordinate with federal, state, and local governments.
- FPS regional officials we interviewed said that if they learn about a demonstration, they evaluate the demonstration (e.g., identify the date, size, and topic of demonstration) for the purpose of contingency planning and to provide for public safety. Depending on the information obtained about the demonstration, a facility's security requirements, and their professional judgment, FPS officials may respond by increasing the security presence at the facility on the day of the demonstration (e.g., by adding FPS officials or requesting support from other law enforcement organizations).
    - Example: A federal tenant official we interviewed said that in response to a 200-person demonstration at his facility, FPS provided about 20 officers. During a smaller protest at the same facility, FPS provided about 5 officers.
    - Example: A Regional Director we interviewed said that if demonstrations occur at federal facility that has a courthouse, FPS obtains support from the U.S. Marshal's Service.

Federal tenant response: Federal tenant officials we interviewed said that when they learn about a planned or impromptu demonstration, they inform FPS and also the employees in their facility.

Example of Response Action: FPS Response to Recent Events

- In October 2014 and January 2015—in response to recent international events (e.g., shootings at the Canadian Parliament and in Paris)—the Secretary of DHS instructed FPS to enhance its presence and security at federal facilities.
  - For example, in January 2015, FPS implemented 12-hour shifts for 20 percent of FPS officials in 20 cities, for a period of 20 days. Furthermore, FPS, among other things, randomly screened federal employees, increased its screening of vehicles, and increased inspections of PSO posts.

Objective 3: Challenges

Bottom line: FPS, GSA, and federal tenant officials we interviewed identified challenges related to sharing and responding to incident information that generally fall into one or more of the following categories: (1) staffing; (2) coordination and preparedness; and (3) technology and access to information. In addition, FPS officials offered examples of actions they are taking to address some of the challenges, which are reported as context for understanding the challenges. Because of the small number of facilities and tenants we selected for this review, we were unable to assess the extent of the challenges identified, their effects, and any mitigation actions taken.

Challenge: Staffing

- FPS regional officials we interviewed cited various challenges related to staffing. For example, they:
  - reported losing FPS officials to other agencies with better pay,
  - stated that the DHS process for hiring and training staff takes 1 to 2 years,
  - said that temporary assignments of FPS officials to other agencies and locations can be a drain on local manpower, and
  - reported that because FPS inspectors are not assigned close to some facilities in some geographically dispersed areas, the inspectors are unable to respond directly to real-time incidents at these facilities.
- FPS regional officials reported that some staffing challenges have resulted in FPS staffing levels that are lower than the authorized level, which could affect FPS's ability to share and respond to incident information. For example:
  - FPS regional officials stated that they do not have adequate manpower to analyze trends or lessons learned from previous incidents.
  - An FPS regional official said that if he is unable to staff FPS officials to a Joint Terrorism Task Force, he may not receive relevant intelligence information.

Challenge: Coordination and Preparedness

- FPS, GSA, and federal tenant officials cited challenges with coordinating response and maintaining adequate levels of training and preparedness. For example:
  - GSA officials stated that it can be difficult to coordinate response actions in facilities with multiple tenants with different missions. For example, federal tenants that interact with the public on a regular basis may be more impacted by an evacuation relative to tenants that do not regularly interact with the public.
  - FPS headquarters officials said that that it is challenging to coordinate with some federal tenants' offices of Inspector General that conduct investigations. An FPS regional official said that, on occasion, federal tenants' offices of Inspector General investigate an incident without notifying FPS.
  - A federal tenant official reported that his facility has had difficulty getting FPS to provide active shooter training to their employees.
  - A federal tenant official reported that because the PSOs in his building are contracted by FPS, he does not have the flexibility to directly modify PSO assignments if he feels it is necessary to address an immediate need.

Challenge: Technology and Access to Information

- FPS officials and a federal tenant official said that FPS's ability to share or respond to incident information may be limited by technology or difficulties accessing information. For example:
  - Several FPS officials reported that, in some cases, there is a lack of interoperability between FPS and local law enforcement radios which can complicate communication during an incident.
  - At one building, a federal tenant official reported that the radios used by PSOs did not have sufficient range or power to cover the entire building, making it difficult to communicate with PSOs in certain areas of the building. FPS headquarters officials said that they sometimes provide PSOs radios depending on the facility but that PSOs use their own radios if their contract requires them to. The officials explained that FPS-provided radios were not designed to have the range or power to cover 100 percent of every facility.
  - FPS regional officials reported that some staff who have appropriate security clearances cannot access relevant classified information at the district and regional levels. Rather these officials must go to fusion centers or headquarters to access and obtain such information.
  - FPS regional officials said that they cannot access and use social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter) on their government devices for gathering and sharing incident information. FPS headquarters officials explained that DHS's protocols for access to social media and FPS's use of social media is tightly controlled. Specifically, FPS's social media policy prevents regional officials from regularly using social media but that they could use it for specific investigations and law enforcement activities if they apply for permission.

Examples of Actions Taken to Address Some of the Challenges

FPS officials described some actions they are taking to address some of the challenges, as described below. We did not assess the mitigation actions taken or the extent to which they address the challenges identified.

Examples of actions taken to address staffing challenges

FPS regional officials identified examples of actions they are taking to address some of the staffing challenges. For example, regional officials said that they

- reassign staff to new locations in order to enhance regional coverage,
- have staff working overtime, and
- coordinate with local law enforcement so that these law enforcement officials can respond in geographically dispersed areas.

Examples of Actions Taken to Address Some of the Challenges continued

Examples of actions taken to address coordination and preparedness challenges

- FPS headquarters officials said that some offices of Inspector General are responsible for conducting investigations and that FPS actively works to maintain working relationships with several of these offices to ensure coordination of threat investigations.
- FPS headquarters officials said that FPS has prioritized active shooter training and that they have conducted numerous active shooter training programs at federal facilities, particularly with high-risk tenants, across the nation.

Examples of Actions Taken to Address Some of the Challenges continued

Examples of actions taken to address technology and access to information challenges

- FPS headquarters officials said that they are integrating radio interoperability considerations into their planning processes. For example, as part of their planning for events they know about ahead of time—such as demonstrations—FPS coordinates with other law enforcement to help ensure that their radios are interoperable.
- FPS officials in headquarters said that they hold weekly classified briefings with executive leadership and regional directors who have access to secured facilities to share relevant information.
- FPS regional officials said that, on occasion, some staff use social media platforms on their own devices to access public information, although FPS headquarters officials said that this is not an FPS-supported practice. Furthermore, FPS officials said that DHS's National Operations Center—which provides real-time situational awareness and monitoring of the homeland—monitors social media platforms and shares relevant information with FPS regional officials.

Table 10: Selected GAO Reports on Federal Facility Security

Product Number	Product Title	Publication Date
GAO-14-101	Federal Facilities: Selected Facilities' Emergency Plans Generally Reflect Federal Guidance	10/25/2013
GAO-13-222	Facility Security: Greater Outreach by DHS on Standards and Management Practices Could Benefit Federal Agencies	1/24/2013
GAO-12-434	Federal Protective Service: Better Data on Facility Jurisdictions Needed to Enhance Collaboration with State and Local Law Enforcement	3/27/2012
GAO-11-857	Federal Courthouses: Improved Collaboration Needed to Meet Demands of a Complex Security Environment	9/28/2011
GAO-11-554	Federal Protective Service: Progress Made but Improved Schedule and Cost Estimate Needed to Complete Transition	7/15/2011
GAO-11-601	Federal Facility Security: Staffing Approaches Used by Selected Agencies	6/30/2011
GAO-10-873	Building Security: New Federal Standards Hold Promise, But Could Be Strengthened to Better Protect Leased Space	9/22/2010
GAO-10-142	Homeland Security: Greater Attention to Key Practices Would Improve the Federal Protective Service's Approach to Facility Protection	10/23/2009
GAO-09-749	Homeland Security: Federal Protective Service Should Improve Human Capital Planning and Better Communicate with Tenants	7/30/2009

Source: GAO. I GAO-15-406R

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