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April 27, 2015

The Honorable Michael T. McCaul
Chairman
The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable Scott Perry
Chairman
The Honorable Bonnie Watson Coleman
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable Jeff Duncan
House of Representatives

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

The April 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Building in Oklahoma City and more recent events, such as the February 2012 shooting at the Anderson Federal Building in Long Beach, California, and the September 2013 Navy Yard shooting in Washington D.C., demonstrate the continued vulnerability of federal facilities to security incidents.[1] Security incidents that may affect federal facilities, their occupants, and visitors, include verbal threats against employees and demonstrations, which could increase security risks. 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).[2] 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.

You asked us to examine how FPS and federal tenants share and respond to information about incidents. This report formally transmits information provided at a briefing held with your offices

[1]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 the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Protective Service. For purposes of this report, we refer to information about incidents as "incident information." Further, our review focuses on incidents that have occurred as well as those that are imminent.

[2]Section 1315(a) of title 40, United States Code, provides that: "To the extent provided for by transfers made pursuant to the Homeland Security Act of 2002, the Secretary of Homeland Security…shall protect the buildings, grounds, and property that are owned, occupied, or secured by the Federal Government (including any agency, instrumentality, or wholly owned or mixed-ownership corporation thereof) and the persons on the property."

on February 10, 2015. The enclosure presents our findings regarding (1) how FPS and selected federal tenants identify and share information they receive on security incidents; (2) the actions, if any, that FPS and selected federal tenants take to respond to incident information, and the factors that guide their responses; and (3) the challenges, if any, that FPS and selected federal tenants face in sharing and responding to incident information.

To address these areas, we reviewed regulations regarding FPS's and federal tenants' requirements to share and respond to incident information, as well as 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. [3] We also interviewed FPS and federal tenant officials who are responsible for security at four FPS-protected facilities in two 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 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 (e.g., GSA-held, GSA-leased, urban location). We selected six federal tenant agencies in the facilities based on these factors: they were the only tenant in the facility, their 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. Additional information on our scope and methodology is included in the enclosure.

We conducted this performance audit from September 2014 to April 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

<u>In summary, we found:</u>

- 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 the incident and response needed. FPS and federal tenant officials we interviewed said that they can identify incident information by, for example, researching formal sources of threat information, such as the Homeland Security Information Network.[4] These officials also said that they can identify incident information from informal sources, such as news media, social media, and professional relationships with, for example, former security colleagues. 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, during an incident at an FPS-protected federal facility, federal tenants are instructed to share the incident information with FPS MegaCenters, which are regional communications centers that are responsible for dispatching FPS law enforcement officials or Protective Security Officers

[3]FPS has 11 regional offices across the country.

[4]The Homeland Security Information Network is a DHS-maintained portal of sensitive but unclassified information on topics such as law enforcement, emergency management, and intelligence.

(PSO), or both to federal facilities during incidents.[5] Federal tenants may also contact local law enforcement directly if, for example, the incident requires an immediate response or if FPS cannot respond quickly due to geographic limitations. FPS officials are instructed to share incident information with federal tenants as appropriate.

- The actions that 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. For example, if an individual makes a threat against a federal employee or facility, FPS officials follow formal guidelines. These FPS-established guidelines require FPS officials to, for example, evaluate the threat (e.g., review reports about the threat and, if appropriate, interview the individual who made the threat) and determine whether further action is needed, such as issuing a cease-and-desist order. FPS instructs federal tenants to respond to threats against employees by contacting FPS's MegaCenter, but as discussed above, they may first call local law enforcement. Regarding demonstrations at or near federal facilities, FPS officials we interviewed said they evaluate the characteristics of the planned demonstration (e.g., the date and potential size of the demonstration), and on the day of the demonstration FPS may increase its presence at the facility accordingly, sometimes with the support of other law enforcement organizations. FPS and federal tenant officials we interviewed said that FPS's response to demonstrations can differ if many people are expected to attend or if they take place near a federal facility that houses certain types of tenants, such as courts.

- FPS, GSA, and federal tenant officials we interviewed cited various challenges related to sharing and responding to incident information that generally fall into one of the following categories: (1) staffing, (2) coordination and preparedness, and (3) technology and access to information. FPS regional officials identified various challenges with staffing, such as hiring and retaining FPS officials and the assignments of these officials in geographically dispersed areas. Some of these staffing challenges could affect FPS's ability to share and respond to incident information, according to FPS regional officials. FPS and GSA officials said that they also experience some coordination challenges. For example, GSA officials said that it can be difficult to coordinate response actions in facilities with multiple tenants with different missions. Finally, FPS officials and a federal tenant official cited technology and access to information challenges, such as a lack of radio interoperability with local law enforcement, which can complicate communication during an incident, and difficulties with some FPS staff accessing classified information. FPS officials described some actions they are taking to address some of the challenges. For example, FPS officials said that they reassign staff to new locations in order to enhance regional coverage and coordinate with local law enforcement so that these law enforcement officials can respond in geographically dispersed areas. Further, FPS headquarters officials said that they are integrating radio interoperability considerations into their planning processes to help ensure that their radios are interoperable during incidents they know about ahead of time (e.g., demonstrations). Because of the small number of facilities and tenants we selected for this review, we were unable to assess the extent of the challenges, their effects, and mitigation actions taken. Nonetheless, some of these challenges may be ongoing concerns. Thus, continued diligence on the part of FPS and federal tenants to address them is important.

[5]FPS has four MegaCenters, located in Colorado, Maryland, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. PSOs are guards contracted by FPS who are responsible for, among other things, responding to emergency situations at some federal facilities.

We provided a draft of this report to DHS and GSA for comment. DHS provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. GSA did not have comments on the draft report.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Department of Homeland Security, and the General Services Administration. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at http://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-2834 or goldsteinm@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are Ray Sendejas (Assistant Director); Roshni Davé; Christopher Ferencik; Geoff Hamilton; Georgeann Higgins; Delwen Jones; Gary Malavenda; Josh Ormond; Carl Ramirez; and Reed Van Beveren.

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Enclosure