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April 25, 2016

The Honorable Ron Johnson

Chairman

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper

Ranking Member

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

United States Senate

High-Risk Series: Key Actions to Make Progress Addressing High-Risk Issues

GAO maintains a high-risk program to focus attention on government operations that it identifies as high risk due to their greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement or the need for transformation to address economy, efficiency, or effectiveness challenges. Our latest High Risk Update, issued in February 2015,¹ provides details on progress made and efforts needed to address 32 high-risk areas according to our five criteria for removal from the list which we published in November 2000: (1) leadership commitment, (2) capacity, (3) action plan, (4) monitoring, and (5) demonstrated progress.²

Our next update to the High Risk List is scheduled for issuance in early 2017. In the interim, you requested that we provide information from our 2015 report on how agencies had made progress addressing high-risk issues. The attached enclosures provide illustrative actions that agencies took that led to progress or removal from our High Risk List. This information could provide guidance to agencies whose programs are on the High Risk List. Additionally, at the end of each enclosure, we provide an illustrative example from our 2015 report of selected areas where progress was not made against criteria and what more needed to be done to demonstrate progress.

Additional progress is both possible and needed in all 32 high-risk areas. Lasting solutions to the federal government's high-risk problems offer the potential to save billions of dollars, dramatically improve service to the American public, strengthen public confidence and trust in the performance and accountability of the national government, and ensure the ability of government to deliver on its promises. Since 1990, more than one-third of the areas GAO previously designated as high risk have been removed from the list because sufficient progress was made in addressing the problems identified. By using the examples in this report as guides, agencies can take actions to make additional progress on the High Risk List. Such actions could result in substantial savings to the federal government and would be reflected in updated program ratings in our 2017 update.

We conducted our work for this report from October 2015 to April 2016 in accordance with all sections of GAO's Quality Assurance Framework that are relevant to our objectives. The framework requires that we plan and perform the engagement to obtain sufficient and appropriate evidence to meet our stated objectives and to discuss any limitations in our work. We believe that the information and data obtained, and the analysis conducted, provide a reasonable basis for the findings and conclusions in this product.

Background

In 1990, we began a program to report on government operations that we identified as "high risk." Since then, generally coinciding with the start of each new Congress, we have reported on the status of progress to address high-risk areas and to update the High Risk List.

Overall, this program has served to identify and help resolve serious weaknesses in areas that involve substantial resources and provide critical services to the public. Since our program began, the federal government has taken high-risk problems seriously and has made long-needed progress toward correcting them. In a number of cases,

¹GAO, *High-Risk Series: An Update*, [GAO-15-290](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 11, 2015).

²GAO, *Determining Performance and Accountability Challenges and High Risks*, [GAO-01-159SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: November 2000).

progress has been sufficient for us to remove the high-risk designation. A summary of changes to our High Risk List over the past 25 years is shown in table 1 and our most recent update to the High Risk List, identifying 32 high-risk areas, was issued in February 2015 as shown in table 2 on page 6.³

Table 1: Changes to the High Risk List, 1990-2015

	Number of areas
Original High Risk List in 1990	14
High-risk areas added since 1990	43
High-risk areas removed since 1990	23
High-risk areas consolidated since 1990	2
High Risk List in 2015	32

Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

Criteria for Removal or for Demonstrating Progress

Our experience with the High-Risk Series over the past 25 years has shown that the key elements needed to make progress in high-risk areas are top-level attention by the administration and agency leaders grounded in the five criteria for removal from the High Risk List, as well as any needed congressional action. The five criteria for removal that we issued in November 2000 are as follows:

- **Leadership Commitment.** Demonstrated strong commitment and top leadership support.
- **Capacity.** Agency has the capacity (i.e., people and resources) to resolve the risk(s).
- **Action Plan.** A corrective action plan exists that defines the root cause, solutions, and provides for substantially completing corrective measures, including steps necessary to implement solutions we recommended.
- **Monitoring.** A program has been instituted to monitor and independently validate the effectiveness and sustainability of corrective measures.
- **Demonstrated Progress.** Ability to demonstrate progress in implementing corrective measures and in resolving the high-risk area.⁴

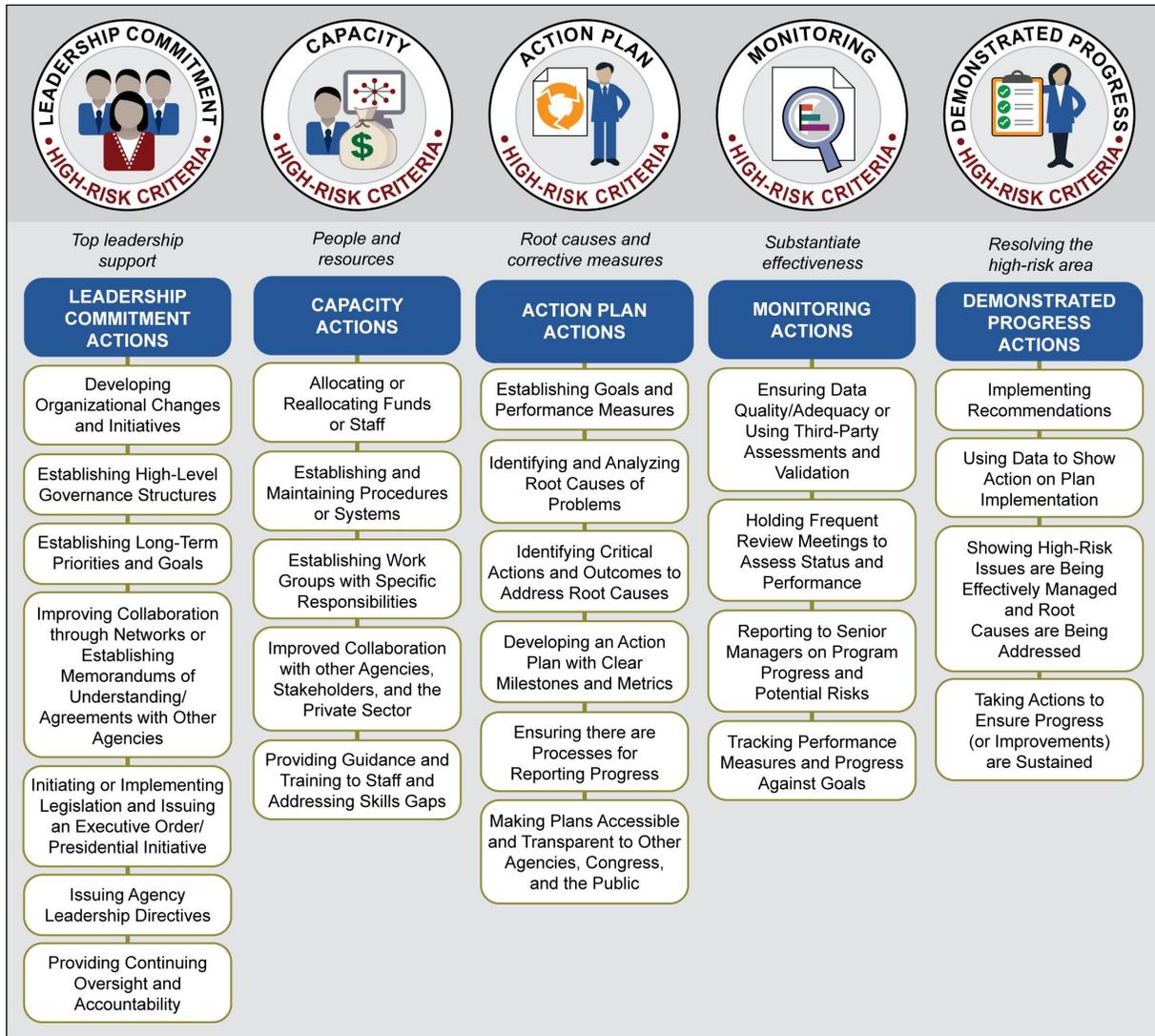
These five criteria form a road map for efforts to improve and ultimately address high-risk issues. Addressing some of the criteria leads to progress, while satisfying all of the criteria is central to removal from the list.

Figure 1 shows the five criteria and illustrative actions taken by agencies to address the criteria. Importantly, the actions listed are not “stand alone” efforts taken in isolation of other actions to address high-risk issues. That is, actions taken under one criterion may be important to meeting other criteria as well. For example, top leadership can demonstrate its commitment by establishing a corrective action plan including long-term priorities and goals to address the high-risk issue and using data to gauge progress—actions which are also vital to addressing the action plan and monitoring criteria.

³GAO-15-290.

⁴GAO-01-159SP.

Figure 1: Criteria for Removal from the High Risk List and Examples of Actions Leading to Progress



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

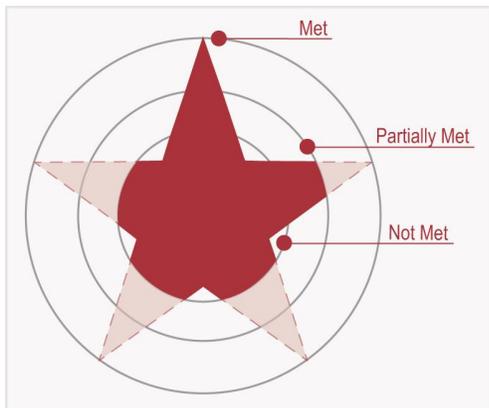
Criteria for Rating Each High-Risk Area

In each of our high risk updates, for more than a decade, we have assessed progress to address the five criteria for removing a high-risk area from the list. In our 2015 update, we added clarity and specificity to our assessments by rating each high-risk area's progress on the criteria and used the following definitions:

- **Met.** Actions have been taken that meet the criterion. There are no significant actions that need to be taken to further address this criterion.
- **Partially Met.** Some, but not all, actions necessary to meet the criterion have been taken.
- **Not Met.** Few, if any, actions towards meeting the criterion have been taken.

Figure 2 shows a visual representation of varying degrees of progress in each of the five criteria for a high-risk area. Each point of the star represents one of the five criteria for removal from the High Risk List and each ring represents one of the three designations: not met, partially met, or met. An unshaded point at the innermost ring means that the criterion has not been met, a partially shaded point at the middle ring means that the criterion has been partially met, and a fully shaded point at the outermost ring means that the criterion has been met.

Figure 2: High-Risk Progress Criteria Ratings



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

We met with agency leaders to discuss preliminary progress ratings beginning in the spring of 2014 leading up to the 2015 update, and we are continuing those discussions to help agencies maintain progress leading up to the 2017 update. These meetings focus on actions taken and on additional actions that need to be taken to address the high-risk issues. Several agency leaders told us that the additional clarity provided by the progress rating helped them better target their improvement efforts.

In our 2015 update, we reported that there had been solid and steady progress on the vast majority of the 30 high-risk areas from our 2013 list. Progress was possible through the concerted actions and efforts of Congress and the leadership and staff in agencies and within the Office of Management and Budget. As shown in table 2, 18 high-risk areas met or partially met all criteria for removal from the list; 11 of these areas also fully met at least one criterion. Further, 2 of these areas—Protecting Public Health through Enhanced Oversight of Medical Products and Department of Defense (DOD) Contract Management—made enough progress to remove subcategories of the high-risk areas. Overall, 28 high-risk areas were rated against the 5 criteria, totaling a possible 140 high-risk area criteria ratings. Of these, 20 (or 14 percent) were rated as met.

Table 2: High-Risk Areas Rated Against Five Criteria for Removal from GAO’s High Risk List (as Reported in the 2015 High Risk Update)

High-risk area	Met	Partially met	Not met
NASA Acquisition Management	3	2	0
Establishing Effective Mechanisms for Sharing and Managing Terrorism-Related Information to Protect the Homeland	2	3	0
Protecting Public Health through Enhanced Oversight of Medical Products	2	3	0
Strengthening Department of Homeland Security Management Functions	2	3	0
DOD Contract Management	1	4	0
DOD Supply Chain Management	1	4	0
DOD Weapon Systems Acquisition	1	4	0
Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources	1	4	0
Medicare Program	1	4	0
Mitigating Gaps in Weather Satellite Data	1	4	0
Ensuring the Security of Federal Information Systems and Cyber Critical Infrastructure and Protecting the Privacy of Personally Identifiable Information	1	4	0
DOD Support Infrastructure Management	0	5	0
Ensuring the Effective Protection of Technologies Critical to U.S. National Security Interests	0	5	0
Improving and Modernizing Federal Disability Programs	0	5	0
Medicaid Program	0	5	0
Modernizing the U.S. Financial Regulatory System and the Federal Role in Housing Finance	0	5	0
National Flood Insurance Program	0	5	0
Restructuring the U.S. Postal Service to Achieve Sustainable Financial Viability	0	5	0
Enforcement of Tax Laws	1	3	1
Managing Federal Real Property	1	3	1
DOD Business Systems Modernization	0	4	1
Strategic Human Capital Management	0	4	1
Transforming EPA’s Processes for Assessing and Controlling Toxic Chemicals	1	2	2
DOD Financial Management	0	3	2
Limiting the Federal Government’s Fiscal Exposure by Better Managing Climate Change Risks	0	3	2
Improving Federal Oversight of Food Safety	0	3	2
DOE’s Contract Management for the National Nuclear Security Administration and Office of Environmental Management	1	1	3
DOD Approach to Business Transformation	0	2	3
Funding the Nation’s Surface Transportation System	N/A	N/A	N/A
Improving the Management of IT Acquisitions and Operations	N/A	N/A	N/A
Managing Risks and Improving VA Health Care	N/A	N/A	N/A
Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation Insurance Programs	N/A	N/A	N/A

Legend: N/A = Not applicable.

Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

Note: Four high-risk areas received a “not applicable” rating because (1) they were either new to the 2015 High Risk List (Managing Risks and Improving VA Health Care and Improving the Management of IT Acquisitions and Operations) or (2) addressing the high-risk area primarily involves congressional action (Funding the Nation’s Surface Transportation System and Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation Insurance Programs).

Selected Examples Demonstrating Progress and Lack of Progress on GAO's High Risk List

The attached enclosures first present illustrative examples from recent high risk updates for each of the five criteria that demonstrate actions agencies have taken that led to progress or removal from the High Risk List. We chose examples from the overall 2015 high-risk areas (as shown previously in table 2) as well as, in some cases, from specific subcategories under the overall high-risk area.⁵ To provide balance, at the end of each enclosure, we also present an example demonstrating lack of progress on high-risk issues that subsequently resulted in a “not met” rating. The examples we chose do not represent an exhaustive list of all examples from our previous high risk updates. We chose these examples because they represented a wide range of agencies and high-risk issues and presented actions that could be transferrable within the federal government.

Further, while each enclosure lists examples of actions that we would look for in determining if an agency met that particular criterion, these lists do not represent an exhaustive list of all possible actions that agencies could take to address the criterion, nor do they represent a “checklist” of items that must be addressed to demonstrate progress. The nature of high-risk areas dictates the specific actions to be taken and some of our listed actions may not apply, and there may be other actions outside of our list that are more appropriate to implement and demonstrate progress. For a complete discussion of actions taken by agencies and actions that need to be taken, see our 2015 High Risk Update.⁶

As agreed with your offices, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 30 days from the report date. If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@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 listed in enclosure 6.



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Managing Director, Strategic Issues

Enclosures – 6

⁵A high-risk area could be composed of several specific subcategories such as in the case of the high-risk area of Protecting Public Health through Enhanced Oversight of Medical Products. In our 2015 update, that high-risk area was composed of four different subcategories—Medical Device Recalls, Safe Medical Devices Act of 1990, Response to Globalization, and Drug Availability—each of which received separate ratings against each of GAO's five high-risk criteria. Consequently, the overall high-risk area rating reflected a composite of the ratings received under the four subcategories for each of the five high-risk criteria.

⁶[GAO-15-290](#).

Enclosure I: Leadership Commitment



Progress in Addressing High-Risk Criteria: Leadership Commitment

To meet the leadership commitment criteria, there needs to be demonstrated strong commitment and top leadership support at the agency, congressional, or presidential levels. In 2015, most high-risk areas, overall, either “met” or “partially met” the criteria of leadership commitment, as demonstrated in table 3.

Table 3: Number of 2015 High-Risk Areas Meeting, Partially Meeting, and Not Meeting the Criteria of Leadership Commitment

Met	15
Partially Met	13
Not Met	0

Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

Note: Four high-risk areas received a “not applicable” rating because (1) they were either new to our 2015 High Risk List or (2) addressing the high-risk area primarily involves congressional action. Additionally, the numbers in the table reflect overall high-risk areas from our 2015 High Risk List. Our examples on the forthcoming pages were selected from the overall 2015 high-risk areas, from specific subcategories of those high-risk areas, or from both.

On the following pages are four examples that show one or more of the actions agencies took to meet the criteria of leadership commitment and an example showing a high-risk area that had not met the criteria.

High-Risk Example: Establishing Effective Mechanisms for Sharing and Managing Terrorism-Related Information to Protect the Homeland

Issue:

The government faces significant challenges in analyzing and disseminating terrorism-related information in a timely, accurate, and useful manner. Since designating this issue as high risk in 2005, we have monitored federal efforts to implement the Information Sharing Environment (Environment)—an overarching approach to strengthening the sharing of terrorism-related information, including intelligence, terrorism, homeland security, law enforcement, and other information among federal, state, local, tribal, international, and private sector partners. Continued progress toward improved information sharing is critical in order to reduce the risks of threats to the homeland—such as the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013—and to respond to the changing nature of domestic threats.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

In our 2013 High Risk Update, we reported that the federal government had fundamentally met this high-risk criteria. For example, in December 2012, the President developed organizational changes by signing the National Strategy for Information Sharing and Safeguarding (National Strategy). This presidential initiative provided guidance on implementing policies, standards, and technologies that promote secure and responsible national security information sharing. In 2013, the Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment released the Strategic Implementation Plan for the National Strategy, which identified 16 priority objectives that are key to implementing the Environment. In addition, the Program Manager issued the Information Interoperability Framework, which describes key elements intended to help link systems across departments to enable information sharing. Further, key departments took various actions to govern their own information sharing activities and to coordinate with the Environment. For example, as we reported in 2012, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) established a high-level governance board to serve as the decision-making body for DHS information sharing. This board identified information-sharing gaps and developed a list of key initiatives to help address those gaps.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area “met” the criteria of leadership commitment as well as the criteria of capacity in our 2015 update, we reported that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—action plan, monitoring, and demonstrated progress, all of which received “partially met” ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Protecting Public Health through Enhanced Oversight of Medical Products

Issue:

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has the vital mission of protecting the public health by overseeing the safety and effectiveness of medical products—drugs, biologics, and devices—marketed in the United States. We added the oversight of medical products to our High Risk List in 2009 because FDA was facing a variety of difficulties that threatened to compromise its ability to protect the public health. Those challenges included rapid changes in science and technology, globalization, and unpredictable public health crises. This example discusses both the overall high-risk area of Protecting Public Health through Enhanced Oversight of Medical Products as well as a subcategory of that overall high-risk area—Medical Device Recalls. FDA greatly improved its oversight of medical device recalls by fully implementing all of the recommendations made in our 2011 report on this topic. Because of these efforts as well as other progress in overseeing medical device safety, we narrowed the overall high-risk area in our 2015 update.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

In our 2015 update, we reported that FDA’s leadership commitment was made evident with the issuance of (1) a 2012 report on its strategies for responding to globalization; (2) a strategic plan in October 2013 that stressed developing long-term prevention strategies to address the underlying causes of supply disruptions and prevent drug shortages; and (3) a September 2014 publication of its strategic priorities for fiscal years 2014 through 2018, which featured its desire to expand its regulatory presence and partnerships overseas to build a stronger, more secure global product safety net.

In 2011, we reported on gaps in FDA’s oversight of the subcategory of Medical Device Recalls. FDA demonstrated its leadership commitment to enhanced oversight of medical device recalls through multiple actions. As part of its efforts, it initiated a recall improvement project. As we recommended, FDA took steps to ensure consistent application of its recall procedures and developed explicit criteria and set thresholds for effective corrections or removals of defective products. FDA also established a standardized recall termination review process for effective completion of recalls and routine application of the stated criteria. As we also recommended, FDA began a recall monitoring program and, in March 2014, issued a report analyzing medical device recall data from fiscal years 2003 through 2012. The report stated that FDA would continue to use recall information to better inform decision making across the total product life cycle, provide guidance to industry, and target needed interventions. It noted that reviewing and analyzing these data would help to guide both it and industry in strategically focusing on efforts to improve the quality of medical devices and thereby improve patient outcomes—another indicator of the agency’s commitment to enhancing its oversight of medical device safety.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While the overall high-risk area “met” the criteria of leadership commitment as well as the criteria of action plan in our 2015 update, we reported that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—capacity, monitoring, and demonstrated progress, all of which received “partially met” ratings. As stated previously, the subcategory of Medical Device Recalls received “met” ratings for all five criteria and we subsequently narrowed the overall high-risk area in our 2015 update.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Ensuring the Effective Protection of Technologies Critical to US National Security Interests – Export Controls

Issue:

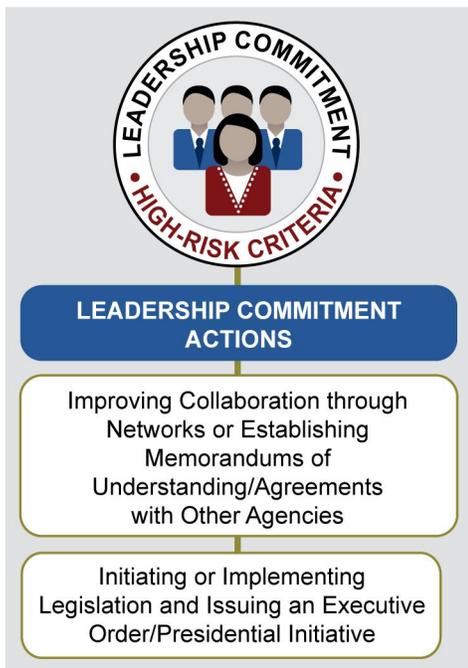
The Department of Defense (DOD) spends billions of dollars each year to develop and acquire sophisticated technologies to provide an advantage for the warfighter during combat or other missions. Many of these technologies are also sold or transferred to promote U.S. economic, foreign policy, and national security interests. The U.S. government has an export control program to regulate these exports and ensure that items and information are transferred to foreign parties in a manner consistent with U.S. interests. The government also has a number of non-export control programs, including the Foreign Military Sales program, anti-tamper policies, and reviews of transactions that could result in control of a U.S. business by a foreign person. These programs are administered by multiple federal agencies with various interests, including DOD and the Departments of Commerce, Homeland Security, Justice, State, and the Treasury. We designated this area as high risk in 2007 because we found these decades-old programs to be ill-equipped to address the evolving 21st century challenge of balancing national security concerns and economic interests. Our past work highlighted the need for export control reform due to poor interagency coordination, inefficiencies in the license application process, and a lack of systematic assessments. This example is based on the subcategory, Export Controls, of the overall high-risk area, Ensuring the Effective Protection of Technologies Critical to U.S. National Security Interests.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

As we reported in our 2015 update, for the export controls subcategory of this high-risk area, the administration demonstrated leadership commitment by issuing Executive Order 13558 in 2010 establishing the Export Enforcement Coordination Center. The Center created a network of 15 agencies and set forth the capacity for “deconfliction”—a procedure for coordinating enforcement efforts at multiple agencies—and dispute resolution among export control agencies represented at the Center. Additionally, to improve communication and coordination in the export licensing process, DOD signed separate agreements with the Departments of State and Commerce to adopt its export licensing system.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While the export controls subcategory of this high-risk area “met” the criteria of leadership commitment as well as the criteria of action plan in our 2015 update, we reported that this subcategory did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—capacity, monitoring, and demonstrated progress, all of which received “partially met” ratings. Further, the second subcategory of this high-risk area, non-export controls, still needs to address all five criteria—leadership commitment, capacity, action plan, monitoring, and demonstrated progress—as all of them received “partially met” ratings in our 2015 update.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Strengthening Department of Homeland Security Management Functions

Issue:

We initially designated implementing and transforming the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as high risk in 2003 because DHS had to transform 22 agencies—several with major management challenges—into one department. While DHS has made considerable progress since then, in our 2015 High Risk Update we reported that key to addressing its management challenges is DHS’s ability to achieve sustained progress across the 30 actions and outcomes that we identified and that DHS agreed were needed to address the high-risk area. However, we reported that 21 of the identified actions and outcomes had not been fully addressed. Since our 2015 High Risk Update, DHS has fully addressed another outcome, but needs to make continued progress in achieving the remaining 20.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

The Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security, the Under Secretary for Management at DHS, and other senior officials have demonstrated commitment and top leadership support for addressing the department’s management challenges. They have also taken actions to institutionalize this commitment to help ensure the long-term success of the department’s efforts. For example, in May 2012 the Secretary of Homeland Security modified the delegations of authority between the Management Directorate and its counterparts at the component level to clarify and strengthen the authorities of the Under Secretary for Management across the department. In addition, in April 2014 the Secretary of Homeland Security issued a memorandum, entitled *Strengthening Departmental Unity of Effort*, committing to, among other things, improving DHS’s planning, programming, budgeting, and execution processes through strengthened departmental structures and increased capability. This memorandum identified several initial areas of focus intended to build organizational capacity, such as DHS headquarters’ strategy, planning, and analytical capability.

Progress needed on other criteria:

In addition to this high-risk area receiving a “met” rating for the criteria of leadership commitment, it also received a “met” rating for the criteria of action plan in our 2015 update and “partially met” ratings for the criteria of capacity, monitoring, and demonstrated progress. On March 16, 2016, we reported that DHS subsequently met the monitoring criteria and therefore met three criteria and partially met the remaining two criteria.³



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

³GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Progress Made, but Work Remains in Strengthening Acquisition and Other Management Functions*, GAO-16-507T (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 16, 2016).

High-Risk Example: DOD Support Infrastructure Management – Achieving Cost Savings and Efficiencies in Base Support

Issue: The Department of Defense (DOD) manages a global real property portfolio that consists of more than 562,000 facilities located on more than 5,000 sites worldwide and covering more than 28 million acres. With a replacement value of about \$880 billion, this infrastructure is critical to maintaining military readiness, and the cost to build and maintain it represents a significant financial commitment. We added this area to our High Risk List in 1997 due to DOD’s long-term challenges in managing its portfolio of facilities and achieving cost savings and efficiencies in base support through joint basing. In 2011, due to significant progress by DOD in the areas of planning and funding to sustain facilities, we narrowed the overall high-risk area of DOD Support Infrastructure Management to focus on two subcategories—(1) Reducing Excess Infrastructure and (2) Achieving Cost Savings and Efficiencies in Base Support. In 2015, we reported that while DOD had made progress in reducing excess infrastructure, it had shown limited improvement in the subcategory of achieving cost savings and efficiencies in base support, upon which this example is based.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Not Met” rating:

In November 2012, we reported that DOD had not demonstrated sufficient leadership commitment through its joint basing initiative because it had not developed guidance for the joint bases to achieve the initiative’s goal of cost savings or efficiencies. We further reported in September 2014 that DOD had not conducted a mid-program review of the purpose and goals of the joint basing initiative and that DOD’s lack of direction had hindered the joint bases’ progress in achieving goals.

What remains to be done:

In our 2015 update, we reported that DOD needed to take a number of actions to satisfy the criteria for leadership commitment including

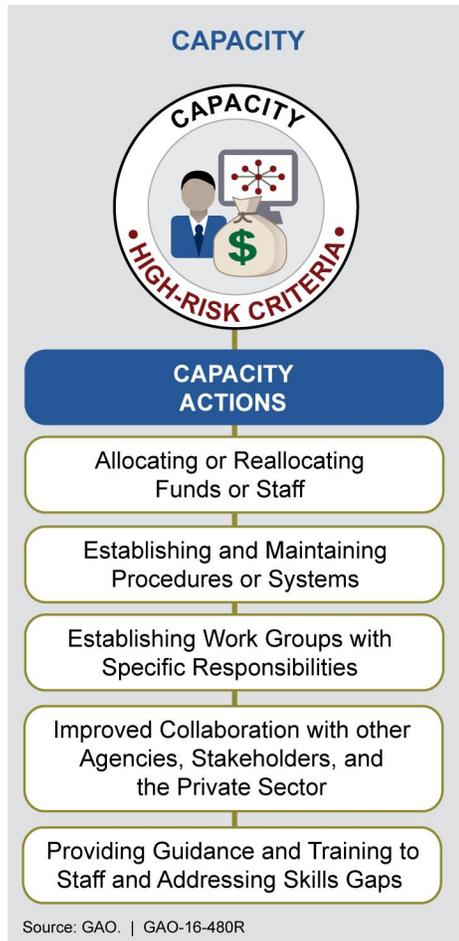
- evaluating the purpose of the program and determining whether DOD’s current goals are still appropriate or should be revised;
- providing clear direction to the joint bases about the goals, time frames, and measures in consolidating base support services;
- working with the military services to determine what reporting requirements and milestones should be in place to increase support and commitment for the program’s goals; and
- reviewing and prioritizing the common standards in all functional areas to ensure a shared framework of management and planning of base support services.

DOD did not concur with the recommendations stating that the goal of the joint basing program remains to increase the efficiency of delivering installation support and that the program has generated savings. Our recommendations are still valid given continued confusion at the joint bases over the goals of the program, as well as DOD’s inability to isolate cost savings resulting from consolidation versus service-wide budget cuts.

Progress needed on other criteria:

In addition to this high-risk area subcategory receiving a “not met” rating for the criteria of leadership commitment, we reported that it also received a “not met” rating for the criteria of action plan in our 2015 update. We also reported in 2015 that it received “partially met” ratings for the criteria of capacity, monitoring, and demonstrated progress.

Enclosure II: Capacity



Progress in Addressing High-Risk Criteria: Capacity

To meet the capacity criteria, an agency needs to demonstrate that it has the capacity (i.e., people and resources) to resolve its risk. In 2015, most high-risk areas “partially met” the criteria of capacity, as demonstrated in table 4.

Table 4: Number of 2015 High-Risk Areas Meeting, Partially Meeting, and Not Meeting the Criteria of Capacity

Met	1
Partially Met	24
Not Met	3

Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

Note: Four high-risk areas received a “not applicable” rating because (1) they are either new to our 2015 High Risk List or (2) addressing the high-risk area primarily involves congressional action. Additionally, the numbers in the table reflect overall high-risk areas from our 2015 High Risk List. Our examples on the forthcoming pages were selected from the overall 2015 high-risk areas or from specific subcategories of those high-risk areas.

On the following pages are five examples that show one or more of the actions agencies took to either meet or partially meet the criteria of capacity and an example showing a high-risk area that had not met the criteria.

High-Risk Example: Establishing Effective Mechanisms for Sharing and Managing Terrorism Related Information to Protect the Homeland

Issue:

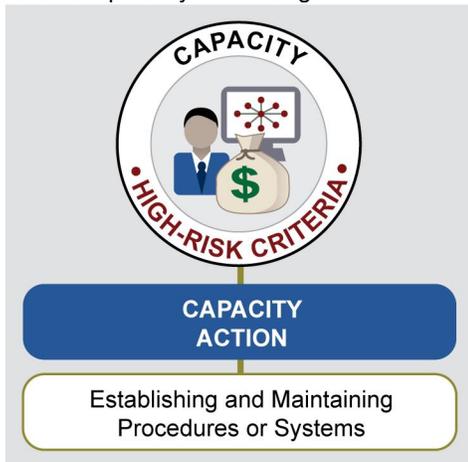
The government faces significant challenges in analyzing and disseminating terrorism-related information in a timely, accurate, and useful manner. Since designating this issue as high risk in 2005, we have monitored federal efforts to implement the Information Sharing Environment (Environment)—an overarching approach to strengthening the sharing of terrorism-related information, including intelligence, terrorism, homeland security, law enforcement, and other information among federal, state, local, tribal, international, and private sector partners. Continued progress toward improved information sharing is critical in order to reduce the risks of threats to the homeland—such as the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013—and to respond to the changing nature of domestic threats.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

In our 2015 High Risk Update, we reported that the federal government had met the capacity high-risk criteria through several actions establishing new procedures or systems. For example, the government changed its approach to funding information-sharing activities, and funding is now a part of mission activities and operations. Additionally, the Strategic Implementation Plan for the National Strategy, which identified 16 priority objectives that are key to implementing the Environment, defines the fundamental technological capabilities and services for advancing the Environment. Further, the Program Manager issued the Information Interoperability Framework, which describes key elements intended to help link systems across departments to enable information sharing. Finally, the Program Manager and key departments also continued to make progress in identifying and establishing technological services consistent with a federated architecture approach.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area “met” the criteria of capacity as well as the criteria of leadership commitment in our 2015 update, we reported that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—action plan, monitoring, and demonstrated progress, all of which received “partially met” ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: DOD Supply Chain Management – Inventory Management; Material Distribution.

Issue:

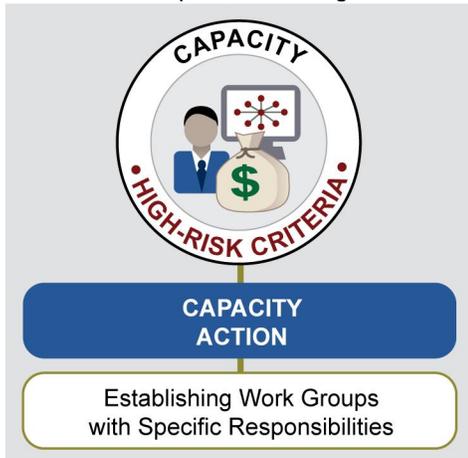
The Department of Defense (DOD) manages more than 5 million secondary inventory items, such as spare parts, with a reported value of approximately \$96.5 billion, as of September 2014. DOD’s inventory management practices and procedures have been ineffective and inefficient and we added this area to our High Risk List in 1990. DOD has had high levels of inventory that were excess to requirements and weaknesses in accurately forecasting the demand for inventory items. DOD also has faced challenges in delivering supplies and equipment, including unmet delivery standards and time lines for cargo shipments as well as incomplete delivery data for many surface shipments. In our 2015 High Risk Update, we reported that DOD had made progress in addressing all three dimensions of its supply chain management areas—inventory management, materiel distribution, and asset visibility—but still faced challenges such as continuing improvements in demand forecasting, instituting a means to comprehensively monitor distribution performance, and assessing and refining, as appropriate, existing performance measures to achieve asset visibility goals. This example is based on the subcategories of Inventory Management and Materiel Distribution of the overall high-risk area, DOD Supply Chain Management.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

As we reported in our 2015 update, DOD demonstrated it had the people and resources to improve both inventory management and materiel distribution by establishing work groups tasked with specific area responsibilities. For example, to improve inventory management, in May 2012 we reported that the department had established three workgroups—forecasting and demand planning, inventory and retention, and supply chain metrics—that were responsible for implementing actions focused on the respective areas. To improve materiel distribution, DOD created a governance structure that included staff, organizations, and working groups across the department to address issues related to materiel distribution execution. In addition, TRANSCOM (US Transportation Command) established the Distribution Performance Branch with the specific responsibilities for assessing global distribution performance, leading the negotiation of distribution performance standards with stakeholders, and converting data into objective performance reports.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While the high-risk area subcategory of inventory management “met” the criteria of capacity as well as the criteria of leadership commitment, action plan, and monitoring in our 2015 update, we reported that it needed to address the criteria of demonstrated progress, which received a “partially met” rating. Additionally, while the high-risk area subcategory of materiel distribution “met” the criteria of capacity as well as the criteria of leadership commitment in our 2015 update, we reported that it needed to address the criteria of action plan, monitoring, and demonstrated progress, all of which received “partially met” ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Protecting Public Health Through Enhanced Oversight of Medical Products – Response to Globalization

Issue:

We added the oversight of medical products to our High Risk List in 2009 because the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was facing a variety of difficulties that threatened to compromise its ability to protect the public health. For example, FDA faced challenges with its capacity to inspect foreign establishments that manufacture medical products. This example is based on a subcategory, Response to Globalization, of the overall high-risk area, Protecting Public Health through Enhanced Oversight of Medical Products. According to FDA, nearly 40 percent of finished drugs and about 50 percent of all medical devices are made overseas, with products coming from more than 150 countries. The rapid pace and magnitude of globalization has complicated FDA's efforts to ensure that the medical products the public needs are of high quality.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Partially Met” rating:

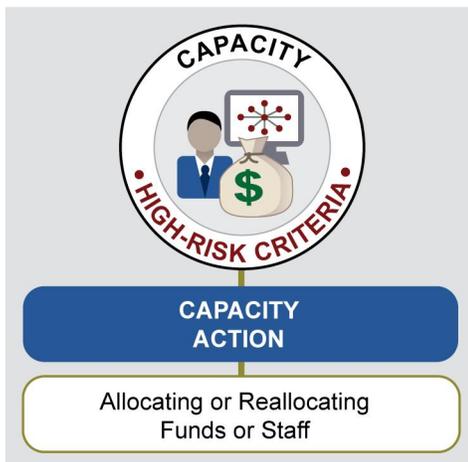
As we reported in our 2015 update, FDA increased its presence overseas by allocating funds and staff to open new offices and had established a permanent presence overseas in 12 foreign posts. Among other things, these offices helped FDA build partnerships with its foreign regulatory counterparts and industry by providing enhanced opportunities for cooperation and capacity building.

What remains to be done:

FDA has yet to develop a set of performance goals and measures that can be used to monitor the long-term contributions of its overseas offices and demonstrate progress in improving the regulation and oversight of imported medical products, as we recommended in 2010. In addition, the agency continues to face capacity constraints, as it struggles to find officials to staff its overseas offices. Further, our 2010 recommendation that FDA develop a strategic workforce plan to ensure its ability to recruit and retain staff with necessary experience remains to be addressed.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area subcategory “partially met” the criteria of capacity and received “met” ratings for the criteria of leadership commitment and action plan in our 2015 update, we reported that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—monitoring and demonstrated progress, both of which received “partially met” ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Strategic Human Capital Management

Issue:

Mission-critical skills gaps in such occupations as cybersecurity and acquisition pose a high risk to the nation—whether within specific federal agencies or across the federal workforce, they impede federal agencies from cost-effectively serving the public and achieving results. We added Strategic Human Capital Management to our High Risk List in 2001. In February 2011, we reported that closing current and emerging critical skills gaps would require agencies to work with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), other agencies, and the Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) Council to address critical skills gaps that cut across several agencies.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Partially Met” rating:

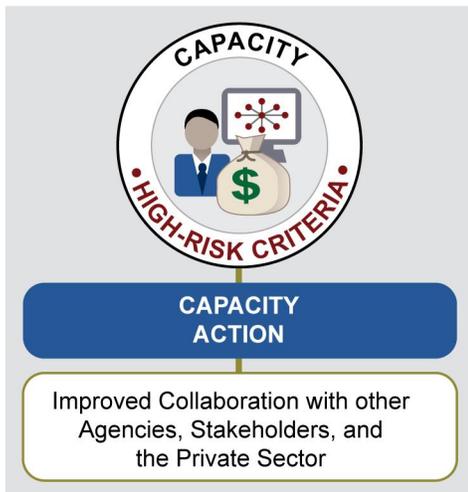
In September 2011, OPM and the CHCO Council created the Chief Human Capital Officers Council Working Group—a collaborative effort among OPM, the Office of Management and Budget, and us—to identify and address critical skills gaps that cut across federal agencies. As a result of this effort, OPM was able to identify key senior federal officials from each of the six government-wide mission-critical occupations to serve as “sub-goal leaders” and held quarterly meetings with agencies to review progress against the specific Cross-Agency Priority goal of closing skills gaps by 50 percent in three to five mission-critical occupations by September 2013. Additionally, in February 2016, OPM proposed a regulation intended to provide more comprehensive guidance for federal agencies to design and implement proven strategies for closing skills gaps.

What remains to be done:

As we reported in our 2015 update, addressing government-wide skills gaps will require collecting data on federal workforce competencies. According to OPM officials, federal agencies’ ability to assess workforce competencies varies, which makes collection of government-wide data on competency gaps difficult. OPM needs to work with agency CHCOs to bolster agencies’ capacity to assess workforce competencies and to ensure that such information can be stored and used for government-wide workforce analysis.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area “partially met” the criteria of capacity, we reported in our 2015 update that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—leadership commitment, action plan, and monitoring, all of which received “partially met” ratings, and demonstrated progress, which received a “not met” rating.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: DOD Contract Management – Acquisition Workforce

Issue:

The Department of Defense (DOD) obligates about \$300 billion annually on contracts for goods and services, including major weapon systems, support for military bases, information technology, consulting services, and commercial items. Our work and that of others has identified challenges DOD faces within four segments of contract management: (1) acquisition workforce, (2) contracting techniques and approaches, (3) service acquisitions, and (4) operational contract support. Ensuring DOD has the people, skills, capacities, tools, and data needed to make informed acquisition decisions is essential if DOD is to effectively and efficiently carry out its mission in an era of more constrained resources. We added DOD Contract Management to our High Risk List in 1992, and this example is based on a subcategory, Acquisition Workforce, of that overall high-risk area. In 2015, we narrowed the scope of the overall high-risk area because the subcategory of Contracting Techniques and Approaches met all five of our criteria.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Partially Met” rating:

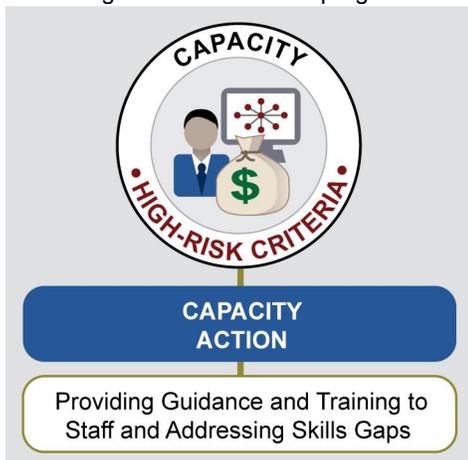
DOD has put an emphasis on growing and training the acquisition workforce over the past several years. DOD has made progress in building the capacity of the acquisition workforce by increasing its size from about 126,000 in 2008 to about 156,000 in September 2015. DOD has also completed competency assessments that identified the current skills and capabilities of the majority of the acquisition workforce and helped identify areas needing further management attention. In that regard, in areas such as cost estimating, our work found that DOD may not have adequate resources to fully implement recent weapon system reform initiatives. We reported in our 2015 update that DOD had taken steps to address or partially address 27 of 32 statutory reporting requirements, such as conducting assessments of critical skills and competencies, in its 2013-2018 civilian workforce plan. However, DOD had not yet addressed the other 5 requirements, including the requirement to assess the appropriate mix of civilian, military, and contractor capabilities in its plan.

What remains to be done:

As we reported in our 2015 update, to further improve outcomes on the billions of dollars spent annually on goods and services, DOD needs to, among other things, (1) continue efforts, including strategic planning and alignment of funding, to increase the department’s capacity to manage and oversee contracts by ensuring that its acquisition workforce is appropriately sized and trained to meet the department’s needs and (2) determine the appropriate mix of military, civilian, and contractor personnel necessary in its workforce plan.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While the acquisition workforce subcategory of the overall high-risk area of DOD Contract Management “partially met” the criteria of capacity, we reported in our 2015 update that the subcategory did receive a “met” rating for the criteria of leadership commitment. Additionally, it received a “not met” rating for the criteria of action plan and “partially met” ratings for the criteria of monitoring and demonstrated progress.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: DOE's Contract Management for the National Nuclear Security Administration and Office of Environmental Management

Issue: Approximately 90 percent of the Department of Energy's (DOE) budget is spent on contracts and large capital asset projects, and DOE relies primarily on contractors to carry out its diverse missions and operate its laboratories and other facilities. We designated DOE's contract management as a high-risk area in 1990 because its record of inadequate management and oversight of contractors had left the department vulnerable to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. In January 2009, to recognize progress made by DOE's Office of Science, we narrowed the focus of its high-risk designation to two DOE program elements—the Office of Environmental Management (EM) and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). Our 2013 high-risk designation focused on EM's and NNSA's major contracts and projects—those with an estimated cost of \$750 million or more. In 2015, we reported EM and NNSA struggled to stay within cost and schedule estimates for most of their major projects.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Not Met” rating:

DOE did not meet the criteria for having the capacity to resolve contract and project management problems. In its 2008 corrective action plan, DOE recognized that having sufficient people and other resources to resolve these problems was one of the top 10 issues facing the department. The plan said that the department lacked an adequate number of federal contracting and project personnel with the appropriate skills to plan, direct, and oversee project execution. In a July 2013 review, DOE noted that its acquisition workforce comprised less than 5 percent of its federal workforce but was responsible for administering contract and other obligations representing more than 90 percent of the agency's annual budget. This review helped identify the extent to which the department had adequate people and resources to effectively manage its acquisition process. However, this review left out other key staff members normally included in the description of the acquisition workforce, such as program and project managers and contracting officer representatives.

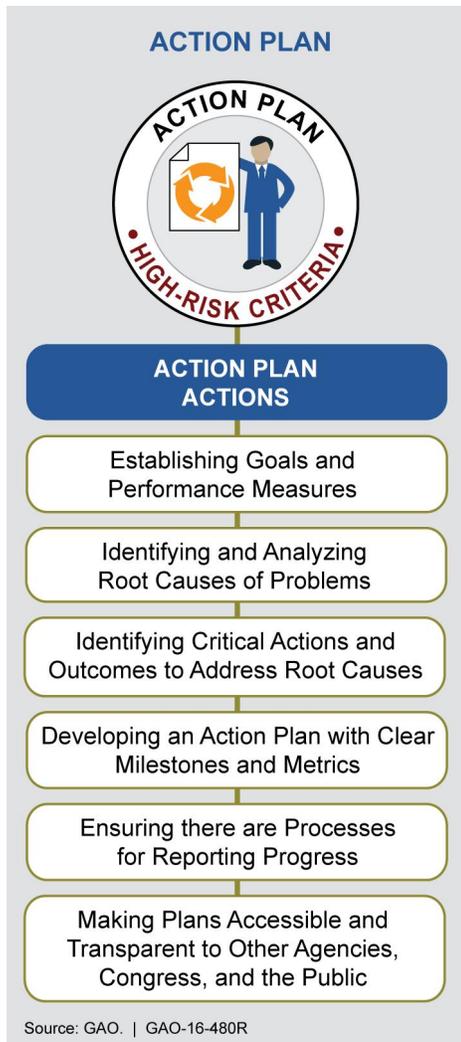
What remains to be done:

As we reported in our 2015 update, DOE must sustain the leadership commitment it has already demonstrated to address its contract and project management challenges. In addition, DOE needs to commit sufficient people and resources to resolve its contract and project management problems.

Progress needed on other criteria:

In addition to this high-risk area receiving a “not met” rating for the criteria of capacity, we reported that it also received “not met” ratings for the criteria of monitoring and demonstrated progress in our 2015 update. We also reported in 2015 that it received a “met” rating for the criteria of leadership commitment and a “partially met” rating for the criteria of action plan.

Enclosure III: Action Plan



Progress in Addressing High-Risk Criteria: Action Plan

To meet the action plan criteria, an agency needs to have a corrective action plan in place that defines the root cause and solutions and that provides for substantially completing corrective measures, including steps necessary to implement solutions we recommended. In 2015, most high-risk areas “partially met” the criteria of action plan, as demonstrated in table 5.

Table 5: Number of 2015 High-Risk Areas Meeting, Partially Meeting, and Not Meeting the Criteria of Having an Action Plan

Met	3
Partially Met	21
Not Met	4

Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

Note: Four high-risk areas received a “not applicable” rating because (1) they were either new to our 2015 High Risk List or (2) addressing the high-risk area primarily involves congressional action. Additionally, the numbers in the table reflect overall high-risk areas from our 2015 High Risk List. Our examples in the forthcoming pages were selected from the overall 2015 high-risk areas or from specific subcategories of those high-risk areas.

On the following pages are five examples that show one or more of the actions agencies took to either meet or partially meet the criteria of having an action plan and an example showing a high-risk area that had not met the criteria.

High-Risk Example: DOD Support Infrastructure Management – Reducing Excess Infrastructure

Issue:

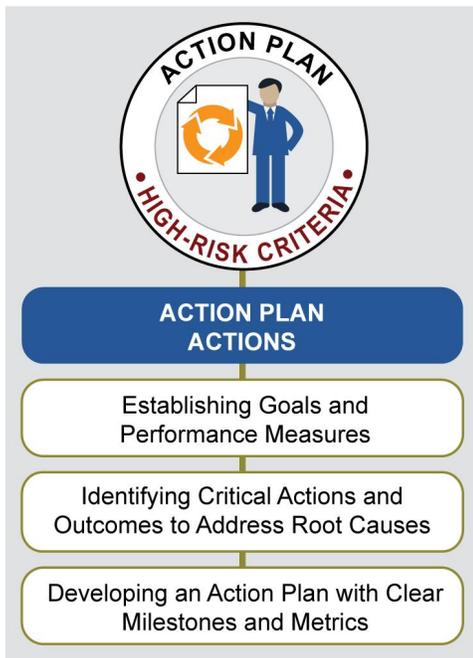
The Department of Defense (DOD) manages a global real property portfolio that consists of more than 562,000 facilities located on more than 5,000 sites worldwide and covering more than 28 million acres. With a replacement value of about \$880 billion, this infrastructure is critical to maintaining military readiness, and the cost to build and maintain it represents a significant financial commitment. We designated this area as high risk in 1997 and, in our 2015 High Risk Update, we reported that DOD had made progress on reducing excess infrastructure but had shown limited improvements in achieving cost savings and efficiencies in base support. This example is based on a subcategory, Reducing Excess Infrastructure, of the overall high-risk area, DOD Support Infrastructure Management.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

In 2015, we reported that DOD had developed a number of action plans under various initiatives that identified corrective measures and outcomes to reduce excess infrastructure. We reported in March 2013 that to implement each of the Base Realignment and Closure 2005 recommendations, DOD developed detailed business plans, which included required actions, clear milestones and time frames, resources needed to complete those actions, and a method for resolving disagreements among stakeholders. To address an Office of Management and Budget memorandum for all federal agencies to maintain the amount of fiscal year 2012 infrastructure government-wide, DOD directed the military services that any new construction to be considered must meet the goal of an equivalent reduction of excess space. DOD identified specific time frames and methods to monitor and report results of the policy. Moreover, some services had plans for reducing excess infrastructure. These plans outlined solutions, corrective actions, and performance measures to implement the goals of their initiatives. For example, the Air Force developed a plan to reduce its infrastructure by 20 percent by fiscal year 2020. In addition, the Army incorporated reducing its footprint and decreasing excess infrastructure into its Army Facility Strategy 2020.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area subcategory “met” the criteria of action plan as well as the criteria of leadership commitment in our 2015 update, we reported that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—capacity, monitoring, and demonstrated progress, all of which received “partially met” ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Protecting Public Health through Enhanced Oversight of Medical Products – Drug Availability

Issue:

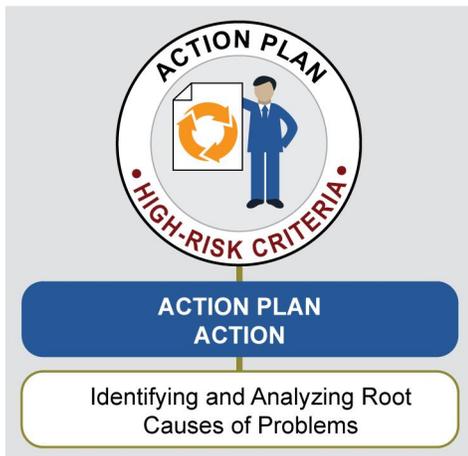
The enhanced oversight of medical products was added to our High Risk List in 2009 because the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) was facing a variety of difficulties that threatened to compromise its ability to protect the public health. This example is based on a subcategory, Drug Availability, of the overall high-risk area, Protecting Public Health through Enhanced Oversight of Medical Products. In 2011, we reported that, despite the recent increases in drug shortages, FDA had not substantially changed the priority it places on its response to drug shortages. We recommended that FDA’s strategic plan articulate goals and priorities for maintaining the availability of all medically necessary drugs.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

FDA issued a strategic plan in October 2013 that identified and analyzed the root causes of problems by focusing on two goals— (1) strengthening FDA’s ability to respond to notices of a disruption in supply, including improving mitigation tools, and (2) developing long-term prevention strategies to address the underlying causes of supply disruptions and prevent drug shortages. We reported in our 2015 update that the plan outlined the actions FDA was taking—or planned to take—to strengthen and expand its efforts and identified potential actions for other stakeholders to consider. In addition, in September 2014, FDA published its strategic priorities for fiscal years 2014 through 2018, which emphasized the agency’s continued commitment to preventing and responding to drug shortages.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area subcategory “met” the criteria of action plan as well as the criteria of leadership commitment in our 2015 update, we reported that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—capacity, monitoring, and demonstrated progress, all of which received “partially met” ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Strengthening Department of Homeland Security Management Functions

Issue:

We initially designated implementing and transforming the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as high risk in 2003 because DHS had to transform 22 agencies—several with major management challenges—into one department. While DHS has made considerable progress since then, in our 2015 High Risk Update, we reported that key to addressing its management challenges is DHS’s ability to achieve sustained progress across the 30 actions and outcomes that we identified and that DHS agreed were needed to address the high-risk area. However, we reported that 21 of the identified actions and outcomes had not been fully addressed. Since our 2015 High Risk Update, DHS has fully addressed another outcome, but needs to make continued progress in achieving the remaining 20.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

In a September 2010 letter to DHS, we identified and DHS agreed to achieve 31 actions and outcomes that are critical to addressing the root causes of challenges within the department’s management areas and in integrating those functions across the department. In March 2014, we updated the actions and outcomes in collaboration with DHS to reduce overlap and ensure their continued relevance and appropriateness. These updates resulted in a reduction from 31 to 30 total actions and outcomes. DHS issued its initial Integrated Strategy for High-Risk Management in January 2011 and has since provided updates to its strategy in 9 later versions, most recently in January 2016. The integrated strategy included key management initiatives and related corrective action plans for addressing DHS’s management challenges and the actions and outcomes we identified. We reported in 2015 that DHS’s strategy and approach to continuously refining actionable steps to implementing the outcomes, if implemented effectively and sustained, provided a path for DHS to be removed from our High Risk List.

Progress needed on other criteria:

In addition to this high-risk area receiving a “met” rating for the criteria of action plan, it also received a “met” rating for the criteria of leadership commitment in our 2015 update and “partially met” ratings for the criteria of capacity, monitoring, and demonstrated progress. On March 16, 2016, we reported that DHS subsequently met the monitoring criteria and therefore met three criteria and partially met the remaining two criteria.^a

^aGAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Progress Made, but Work Remains in Strengthening Acquisition and Other Management Functions*, [GAO-16-507T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 16, 2016).

High-Risk Example: NASA Acquisition Management

Issue:

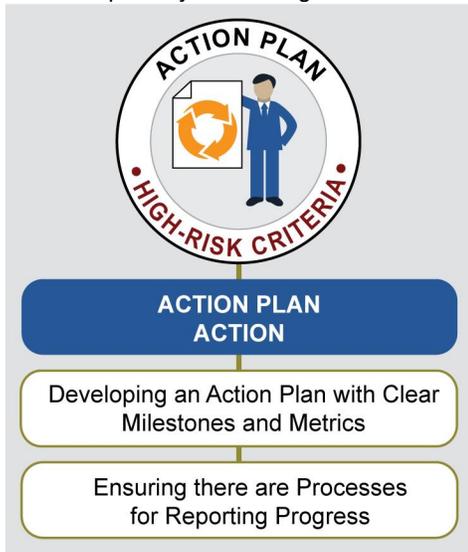
The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) plans to invest billions of dollars in the coming years to explore space, understand Earth's environment, and conduct aeronautics research. We designated NASA's acquisition management as high risk in 1990 in view of NASA's history of persistent cost growth and schedule slippage in the majority of its major projects. Our work has identified a number of causal factors, including antiquated financial management systems, poor cost estimating, and underestimating risks associated with the development of its major systems.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

We reported in our 2009 update that NASA had developed a comprehensive plan in 2007 to address systematic weaknesses related to how it manages its acquisitions. The plan specifically sought to strengthen program/project management, increase accuracy in cost estimating, facilitate monitoring of contractor cost performance, improve agency-wide business processes, and improve financial management. The plan identified specific actions to be taken in each area and established points of accountability and metrics to assess progress. We reported in our 2015 update that NASA had implemented key components of the agency's action plan including instituting new tools aimed at providing increased insight into project performance, such as the collection of earned value management data—a tool designed to help project managers monitor risks—and the Joint Cost and Schedule Confidence Level—a process which assigns a confidence level, or likelihood, of a project meeting its cost and schedule estimates. In 2012, the agency established metrics to more consistently measure a project's design progress and, in 2014, we found that most major projects in the portfolio were tracking and reporting those metrics.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area “met” the criteria of action plan as well as the criteria of leadership commitment and monitoring in our 2015 update, we reported that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—capacity and demonstrated progress, both of which received “partially met” ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Establishing Effective Mechanisms for Sharing and Managing Terrorism Related Information to Protect the Homeland

Issue:

The government faces significant challenges in analyzing and disseminating terrorism-related information in a timely, accurate, and useful manner. Since designating this issue as high risk in 2005, we have monitored federal efforts to implement the Information Sharing Environment (Environment)—an overarching approach to strengthening the sharing of terrorism-related information, including intelligence, terrorism, homeland security, law enforcement, and other information among federal, state, local, tribal, international, and private sector partners. Continued progress toward improved information sharing is critical in order to reduce the risks of threats to the homeland—such as the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013—and to respond to the changing nature of domestic threats.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Partially Met” rating:

We reported in our 2015 update that the federal government made progress in this high-risk area largely by developing the Strategic Implementation Plan for the National Strategy for Information Sharing and Safeguarding, which identified 16 priority objectives critical to implementing the Environment. Each priority objective is housed within a governance entity (e.g., a department, agency, subcommittee, or working group) and assigned a steward. The steward is charged with ensuring that participating agencies communicate and collaborate to complete the objective, while also raising to senior management any issues that might hinder progress. Stewards are to communicate these issues via the Information Sharing and Access Interagency Policy Committee—located within the Executive Office of the President—which is responsible for resolving these barriers. In addition, the implementation plan established a priority objective dedicated to information sharing with the private sector to help ensure that processes and procedures are in place for identifying threats, including those related to cybersecurity and to critical infrastructure—such as financial institutions, commercial facilities, and energy production and transmission facilities, among others. Further, the Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment reports to Congress annually, and the 2014 report identified several instances where key agencies were incorporating other agencies’ initiatives.

What remains to be done:

As we reported in our 2015 update, the Program Manager, in coordination with the Policy Committee and key departments, should demonstrate over time that Environment participants are implementing the approach and concepts described by the March 2014 Information Interoperability Framework across the Environment. The framework describes key elements intended to help link systems across departments to enable information sharing. The Program Manager should also demonstrate that departments and entities are executing key architecture-related tasks described in the implementation plan and are achieving related outcomes.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area “partially met” the criteria of action plan, it “met” the criteria of leadership commitment and capacity in our 2015 update. We also reported that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—monitoring and demonstrated progress, both of which received “partially met” ratings.

High-Risk Example: Improving Federal Oversight of Food Safety

Issue:

We added federal food safety oversight to our High Risk List in 2007 because of risks to the economy, to public health, and to safety. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention indicate that each year, 48 million people get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die as a result of foodborne illness. An independent study in 2012 used a conservative approach to estimate that the cost of foodborne illness in the United States is more than \$14 billion per year. The safety and quality of the U.S. food supply is governed by a highly complex system stemming from at least 30 laws related to food safety that are collectively administered by 15 federal agencies. The agencies with primary food safety oversight responsibility are the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Agency actions that resulted in a “Not Met” rating:

As we reported in our 2015 update, the criteria of having a corrective action plan and a program to monitor corrective measures had not been met. Without a government-wide performance plan for food safety, Congress, program managers, and other decision makers are hampered in their ability to identify agencies and programs addressing similar missions and to set priorities, allocate resources, and restructure federal efforts, as needed, to achieve long-term goals. Currently, to understand what the government is doing to ensure the safety of the food supply, one must reconcile individual documents across 15 federal food safety agencies. Without a centralized collaborative mechanism on food safety—like the now defunct Food Safety Working Group (FSWG)—there is no forum for agencies to reach agreement on a set of broad-based food safety goals and objectives that could be articulated in a government-wide performance plan on food safety.

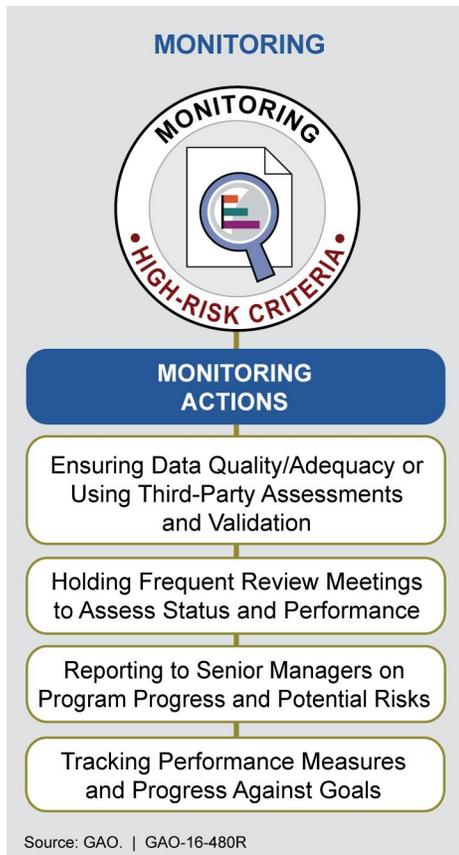
What remains to be done:

In March 2011, we recommended that the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), in consultation with federal agencies that have food safety responsibilities, develop a government-wide performance plan for food safety. However, OMB has not acted on that recommendation. The requirements of the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA) further reflect the need for crosscutting strategic and performance planning for issues that involve multiple federal agencies. To make progress on this criteria, we reported in our 2015 update that (1) Congress should consider directing OMB to develop a government-wide performance plan for food safety and formalizing FSWG through statute, and (2) to provide building blocks toward OMB's development of a government-wide performance plan for food safety, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and USDA should continue to build upon their efforts to implement GPRAMA requirements to address crosscutting food safety efforts. HHS and USDA had taken steps to implement GPRAMA's crosscutting requirements for their food safety efforts but could more fully address crosscutting food safety efforts in their individual strategic and performance planning documents. We also reported that if, over the next several years, weaknesses in the food safety system persist, Congress may wish to assess the need for comprehensive, uniform, risk-based food safety legislation or amend FDA's and USDA's existing authorities. Congress should then also consider commissioning an analysis of alternative organizational structures for food safety.

Progress needed on other criteria:

In addition to this high-risk area receiving a “not met” rating for the criteria of action plan, we reported that it received a “not met” rating for monitoring in our 2015 update and “partially met” ratings for leadership commitment, capacity, and demonstrated progress.

Enclosure IV: Monitoring



Progress in Addressing High-Risk Criteria: Monitoring

To meet the monitoring criteria, an agency needs to demonstrate that a program has been instituted to monitor and independently validate the effectiveness and sustainability of corrective measures. In 2015, most high-risk areas “partially met” the criteria of monitoring, as demonstrated in table 6.

Table 6: Number of 2015 High-Risk Areas Meeting, Partially Meeting, and Not Meeting the Criteria of Monitoring

Met	1
Partially Met	22
Not Met	5

Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

Note: Four high-risk areas received a “not applicable” rating because (1) they were either new to our 2015 High Risk List or (2) addressing the high-risk area primarily involves congressional action. Additionally, the numbers in the table reflect overall high-risk areas from our 2015 High Risk List. Our examples on the forthcoming pages were selected from the overall 2015 high-risk areas or from specific subcategories of those high-risk areas.

On the following pages are three examples that show one or more of the actions agencies took to either meet or partially meet the criteria of monitoring and an example showing a high-risk area that had not met the criteria.

High-Risk Example: DOD Supply Chain Management Inventory Management

Issue:

The Department of Defense (DOD) manages more than 5 million secondary inventory items, such as spare parts, with a reported value of approximately \$96.5 billion, as of September 2014. We added DOD’s Supply Chain Management to our High Risk List in 1990 because DOD’s inventory management practices and procedures were ineffective and inefficient. DOD had high levels of inventory that were excess to requirements and weaknesses in accurately forecasting the demand for inventory items. In our 2015 update, we reported that DOD had made progress in addressing all three dimensions of its supply chain management areas—inventory management, materiel distribution, and asset visibility—but still faced challenges in reducing excess inventory, managing its economic retention stock, and continuing improvements in demand forecasting. This example is based on a subcategory, Inventory Management, of the overall high-risk area, DOD Supply Chain Management.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

As we reported in our 2015 update, DOD took steps to monitor the corrective action plan it submitted to Congress in 2010 in response to requirements in the National Defense Authorization Act. Specifically, in May 2012 DOD established a performance management framework, including metrics and milestones, to track the implementation and effectiveness of its corrective action plan. Implementing the corrective action plan and monitoring the associated metrics required the military services and Defense Logistics Agency (DLA) to participate in monthly progress review meetings with the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Supply Chain Integration, the senior manager who oversaw the process. In addition, the Supply Chain Executive Steering Committee—composed of senior executive-level members from the military services and DLA—advised the Deputy Assistant Secretary on matters related to supply chain management, including implementation of the corrective action plan. The steering committee is used as a forum to resolve issues encountered in implementation of the corrective action plan that cannot be resolved among the implementation workgroups.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area subcategory “met” the criteria of monitoring as well as leadership commitment, capacity, and action plan in our 2015 update, we reported that it received a “partially met” rating for demonstrated progress.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: NASA Acquisition Management

Issue:

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) plans to invest billions of dollars in the coming years to explore space, understand Earth's environment, and conduct aeronautics research. We designated NASA's acquisition management as high risk in 1990 in view of NASA's history of persistent cost growth and schedule slippage in the majority of its major projects. Our work has identified a number of causal factors, including antiquated financial management systems, poor cost estimating, and underestimating risks associated with the development of its major systems.

Agency actions that resulted in a "Met" rating:

NASA took actions to meet the monitoring criteria by tracking performance measures and progress against goals. For example, in 2012, the agency established metrics to more consistently measure a project's design progress and, in 2014, we found that most major projects in the portfolio were tracking and reporting those metrics. In addition, experts that we met with confirmed that NASA's metrics were valid measures to assess design maturity in space systems. Further, as of 2014, all NASA projects required to develop a Joint Cost and Schedule Confidence Level—a process which assigns a confidence level, or likelihood, of a project meeting its cost and schedule estimates—had done so. Finally, NASA took steps to improve the agency's use of earned value management—a tool designed to help project managers monitor risks. These actions helped NASA to launch more projects on time and within cost and, ultimately, to maximize science and exploration objectives.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area "met" the criteria of monitoring as well as leadership commitment and action plan in our 2015 update, we reported that the area did not receive "met" ratings for other criteria—capacity and demonstrated progress, both of which received "partially met" ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Transforming EPA’s Processes for Assessing and Controlling Toxic Chemicals – EPA’s Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS)

Issue:

The Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) ability to effectively implement its mission of protecting public health and the environment is critically dependent on credible and timely assessments of the risks posed by chemicals. Such assessments are the cornerstone of scientifically sound environmental decisions, policies, and regulations under a variety of statutes, such as the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), and the Clean Air Act. EPA conducts assessments of chemicals under its Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) Program. EPA is also authorized under TSCA to obtain information on the risks of chemicals and to control those the agency determines pose an unreasonable risk. Because EPA had not developed sufficient chemical assessment information under these programs to limit exposure to many chemicals that may pose substantial health risks, we added this issue to our High Risk List in 2009. This example is based on a subcategory, EPA’s Integrated Risk Information System, of the overall high-risk area, Transforming EPA’s Processes for Assessing and Controlling Toxic Chemicals.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Partially Met” rating:

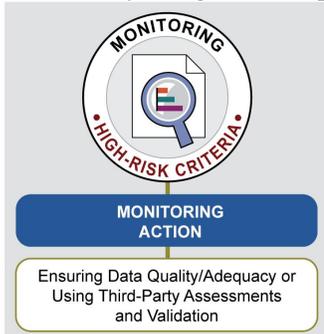
We reported in our 2015 update that the IRIS subcategory of the Transforming EPA’s Processes for Assessing and Controlling Toxic Chemicals high-risk area “partially met” the criteria of monitoring. For example, EPA was implementing our recommendation to submit assessments for independent third-party validation to an entity with scientific and technical credibility—EPA’s Science Advisory Board. Further, EPA presented a plan for how the agency would implement the National Academies’ suggestions for improving IRIS assessments in the “roadmap for revision” included in the National Academies’ peer review report on EPA’s draft formaldehyde assessment. The National Academies’ most recent report on the IRIS program, issued in May 2014, independently validates some of the corrective measures the IRIS program is implementing. However, EPA did not meet the monitoring criteria for its TSCA subcategory of this high-risk area as it did not have mechanisms in place to monitor and independently validate the effectiveness and sustainability of the TSCA program.

What remains to be done:

In 2015, we reported that EPA needed to address recurring issues concerning the clarity and transparency of its development and presentation of draft IRIS assessments as well as long-standing issues regarding the availability and accuracy of current information to IRIS users. These issues include EPA program offices and the status of IRIS assessments—including when an assessment will be started, which assessments are ongoing, and when an assessment is projected to be completed. In addition, EPA should have a strategy for identifying and filling data gaps that would enable it to conduct IRIS toxicity assessments for nominated chemicals that are not selected for assessment because sufficient data from health studies are not available. In 2015, EPA was still responding to the National Academies’ suggestions by implementing changes to the way it developed draft IRIS assessments. We will continue to monitor EPA’s approach including reviewing the IRIS multiyear plan, which had a delayed issuance of December 2015.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area subcategory “partially met” the criteria of monitoring and received a “met” rating for the criteria of leadership commitment in our 2015 update, we reported that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—action plan, which received a “partially met” rating, and capacity and demonstrated progress, both of which received “not met” ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: DOD Approach to Business Transformation

Issue:

The Department of Defense (DOD) spends billions of dollars each year to maintain key business functions intended to support the warfighter. While DOD maintains military forces with unparalleled capabilities, it continues to confront decades-old management weaknesses related to its business functions that support these forces. We added DOD's overall approach to managing business transformation as a high-risk area in 2005 because DOD faces significant challenges in this endeavor, including not taking steps needed to achieve and sustain business reform on a strategic, department-wide basis. These steps will help ensure additional progress in addressing those management weaknesses in DOD's business operations.

Agency actions that resulted in a "Not Met" rating:

As we reported in our 2015 update, DOD had not established a process to monitor progress toward achieving business transformation efforts across all business functions and did not have a clear or comprehensive set of performance measures to assess progress. For example, business function officials said that they did not receive feedback on the performance information submitted to the Office of the Deputy Chief Management Officer (DCMO). Officials at the Office of the DCMO also said its performance measures were ineffective in assessing progress. They noted that information provided by the business functions was unclear and inconsistently collected across all business functions (e.g., while some of the acquisition performance measures can only be calculated annually, information is requested quarterly). We also reported that measures were not well aligned with the strategic goals in DOD's Quadrennial Defense Review, DOD's most recent overarching defense strategy. Therefore, these measures would not enable DOD to determine the extent to which the business functions help to achieve their missions.

What remains to be done:

In June 2014, the Office of the DCMO initiated a series of business process and systems reviews of DOD's business functions, defense agencies, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense to determine the extent to which cost savings and efficiencies could be achieved. As part of these reviews, the Office of the DCMO also worked with DOD's business functions to develop new performance measures. However, there was no timeline for completing this effort across all of the business functions. In our 2015 update, we reported that to effectively monitor progress, DOD needs to (1) refine existing performance measures and update them as needed to ensure that the measures assess progress in achieving all key business transformation initiatives and hold owners of DOD's business functions accountable for providing input into performance targets; and (2) conduct frequent and regular data-driven performance reviews using established performance measures that ensure linkage between DOD goals, program activities, and resources and use existing governance structures, such as the Defense Business Council, to monitor performance.

Progress needed on other criteria:

In addition to this high-risk area receiving a "not met" rating for the criteria of monitoring, it also received "not met" ratings for action plan and demonstrated progress in our 2015 update. It received "partially met" ratings for the criteria of leadership commitment and capacity.

Enclosure V: Demonstrated Progress



Progress in Addressing High-Risk Criteria: Demonstrated Progress

To meet the demonstrated progress criteria, an agency needs to demonstrate progress in implementing corrective measures and in resolving the high-risk area. In 2015, most high-risk areas “partially met” the criteria of demonstrating progress, as shown in table 7.

Table 7: Number of 2015 High-Risk Areas Meeting, Partially Meeting, and Not Meeting the Criteria of Demonstrating Progress

Met	0
Partially Met	21
Not Met	7

Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

Note: Four high-risk areas received a “not applicable” rating because (1) they were either new to our 2015 High Risk List or (2) addressing the high-risk area primarily involves congressional action. Additionally, the numbers in the table reflect overall high-risk areas from our 2015 High Risk List. Our examples on the forthcoming pages were selected from the overall 2015 high-risk areas or from specific subcategories of those high-risk areas.

On the following pages are four examples that show one or more of the actions agencies took to either meet or partially meet the criteria of demonstrating progress and an example showing a high-risk area that had not met the criteria.

High-Risk Example: DOD Contract Management – Contracting Techniques and Approaches

Issue:

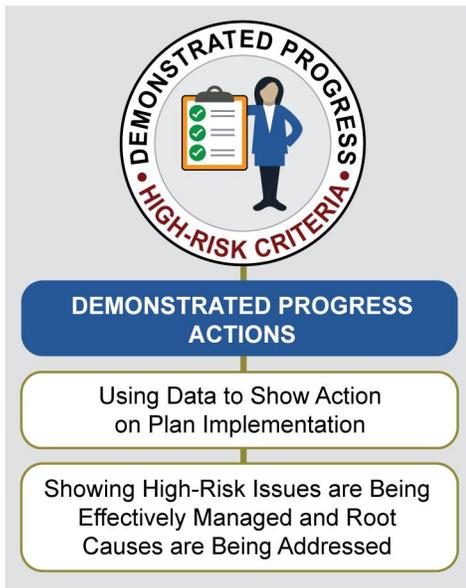
The Department of Defense (DOD) obligates about \$300 billion annually on contracts for goods and services, including major weapon systems, support for military bases, information technology, consulting services, and commercial items. Contracting techniques and approaches encompass the broad array of options available to DOD acquisition and contracting personnel to acquire goods and services. These options include choosing the most appropriate contract type and the effective use of competition. These and other techniques and approaches are critical to the successful acquisition of goods and services. We added DOD Contract Management to our High Risk List in 1992, and this example is based on a subcategory, Contracting Techniques and Approaches, of that overall high-risk area. In 2015, we narrowed the scope of the overall high-risk area because the subcategory of Contracting Techniques and Approaches met all five of our criteria.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Met” rating:

As we reported in our 2015 update, over the past several years DOD has taken significant steps regarding the management and oversight of contracting techniques and approaches. For example, we reported that in March 2014 the Director of the Office of Defense Procurement and Acquisition Policy presented an assessment of DOD competition trends to an executive-level leadership forum that plays a key role in providing oversight in the planning, execution, and implementation of key DOD acquisition initiatives. This assessment provided information on competition rates across DOD and for selected commands within each military department and proposed specific actions to improve competition. Further, in June 2014, DOD issued its second annual assessment of the performance of the defense acquisition system, which included data on its competition rate and goals, assessments of the effect of contract type on cost and schedule control, and the impact of competition on the cost of major weapon systems.

Progress needed on other criteria:

This high-risk area subcategory “met” the criteria of demonstrated progress as well as the four remaining criteria of leadership commitment, capacity, action plan, and monitoring in our 2015 update. However, the remaining three subcategories—Acquisition Workforce, Service Acquisition, and Operational Contract Support—of the overall high-risk area did not meet all five of our criteria. The additional criteria this overall high-risk area needs to address are capacity, action plan, monitoring, and demonstrated progress, all of which received “partially met” ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Strengthening Department of Homeland Security Management Functions

Issue:

We initially designated implementing and transforming the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) as high risk in 2003 because DHS had to transform 22 agencies—several with major management challenges—into one department. While DHS has made considerable progress since then, in our 2015 High Risk Update, we reported that key to addressing its management challenges is DHS’s ability to achieve sustained progress across the 30 actions and outcomes that we identified and that DHS agreed were needed to address the high-risk area. However, we reported that 21 of the identified actions and outcomes had not been fully addressed. Since our 2015 High Risk Update, DHS has fully addressed another outcome, but needs to make continued progress in achieving the remaining 20.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Partially Met” rating:

DHS has implemented a number of actions demonstrating the department’s progress in strengthening its management functions, with 17 actions and outcomes that are either fully or mostly addressed. For example, DHS had strengthened its enterprise architecture program (or blueprint) to guide and constrain information technology acquisitions. Further, DHS has fully addressed 2 financial management outcomes, partially addressed 3, and initiated 3. Most notably, DHS received a clean audit opinion on its financial statements for 3 consecutive years—fiscal years 2013, 2014, and 2015—fully addressing 2 outcomes. In November 2015, DHS’s financial statement auditors also reported that one of four material weaknesses in its internal controls over financial reporting had been reduced to a significant deficiency with its remediation efforts.

What remains to be done:

DHS needs to make continued progress in achieving the remaining 20 of 30 actions and outcomes it has not yet fully addressed. In our 2015 report, we found that DHS continued to face significant management challenges that hindered the department’s ability to accomplish its missions. For example, DHS did not have the acquisition management tools in place to consistently demonstrate whether its major acquisition programs were on track to achieve their cost, schedule, and capability goals. In addition, DHS did not have modernized financial management systems, which affected its ability to have ready access to reliable information for informed decision making. Over the last year DHS has continued to take actions to address these challenges but they have persisted. Addressing these and other management challenges will be a significant undertaking that will likely require several years, but will be critical for the department to mitigate the risks that management weaknesses pose to mission accomplishment.

Progress needed on other criteria:

In addition to this high-risk area receiving a “partially met” rating for the criteria of demonstrated progress, it also received a “met” rating for the criteria of leadership commitment in our 2015 update and “partially met” ratings for the criteria of capacity, monitoring, and demonstrated progress. On March 16, 2016, we reported that DHS subsequently met the monitoring criteria and therefore met three criteria and partially met the remaining two criteria.^a



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

^aGAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Progress Made, but Work Remains in Strengthening Acquisition and Other Management Functions*, GAO-16-507T (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 16, 2016).

High-Risk Example: DOD Business Systems Modernization- DOD Business System Investment Management Process

Issue:

The Department of Defense (DOD) spends billions of dollars each year to acquire modern systems that are fundamental to achieving its business transformation goals, including systems that address key areas such as personnel, financial management, healthcare, and logistics. While DOD’s capacity relative to business systems modernization continues to improve, significant challenges remain. These challenges include fully defining and establishing management controls for business systems modernization. Such controls are vital to ensuring that DOD can effectively and efficiently manage an undertaking with the size, complexity, and significance of its business systems modernization and minimize the associated risks. We added DOD Business Systems Modernization to our High Risk List in 1995, and this example is based on a subcategory, DOD Business System Investment Management Process, of that overall high-risk area.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Partially Met” rating:

We reported in our 2015 update that DOD had improved its business system investment management process by taking steps to define and implement important policies and procedures for managing portfolio-level investments. These policies and procedures are consistent with our Information Technology Investment Management framework and the statutory investment management and business system modernization provisions. For example, in 2014 we reported that DOD was continuing its efforts to further define and implement its defense business system governance framework—the Integrated Business Framework. According to DOD, the framework is intended to align the department’s strategic objectives with its defense business system investments. The department uses this framework, which includes six portfolios that align to eight functional areas, to manage business operations and investments.

What remains to be done:

DOD needs to show continued leadership commitment and progress in addressing our associated recommendations as it takes steps to improve its business system investment management process. For example, DOD needs to ensure that business systems receive the appropriate level of review using a tiered investment review board approach. Furthermore, DOD has not established action plans for addressing gaps in its business system investment management approach and therefore is not monitoring progress demonstrated against such plans.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area subcategory “partially met” the criteria of demonstrated progress, we reported in our 2015 update that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—leadership commitment and capacity, both of which received “partially met” ratings, and action plan and monitoring, both of which received “not met” ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources – Royalty Determination and Collection

Issue:

Federal oil and gas resources generate billions of dollars annually in revenues that are shared among federal, state, and tribal governments. The Department of the Interior (Interior) reported collecting approximately \$48 billion from fiscal years 2009 through 2013 from royalties and other payments companies made. Our work has found that Interior did not have reasonable assurance that it was collecting its share of revenue from oil and gas produced on federal lands and waters. We added the Management of Federal Oil and Gas Resources to our High Risk List in 2011, and this example is based on a subcategory, Royalty Determination and Collection, of that overall high-risk area.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Partially Met” rating:

In our 2015 update, we reported that Interior had implemented a majority of the 36 recommendations we made since 2008 addressing revenue collection weaknesses, including those related to oil and gas production verification and royalty data.

What remains to be done:

To further address its revenue collection challenges, we reported that Interior would need to (1) identify the staffing resources necessary to consistently meet its annual goals for oil and gas production verification inspections; (2) continue meeting its time frames for updating regulations related to oil and gas measurement and onshore royalty rates, among other actions; and (3) provide reasonable assurance that oil and gas produced from federal leases is accurately measured and that the federal government is getting an appropriate share of oil and gas revenues.

Progress needed on other criteria:

While this high-risk area subcategory “partially met” the criteria of demonstrating progress and received a “met” rating for leadership commitment in our 2015 update, we reported that it did not receive “met” ratings for other criteria—capacity, monitoring, and action plan, all of which received “partially met” ratings.



Source: GAO. | GAO-16-480R

High-Risk Example: Transforming EPA's Processes for Assessing and Controlling Toxic Chemicals

Issue:

The Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) ability to effectively implement its mission of protecting public health and the environment is critically dependent on credible and timely assessments of the risks posed by chemicals. Such assessments are the cornerstone of scientifically sound environmental decisions, policies, and regulations under a variety of statutes, such as the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), and the Clean Air Act. EPA conducts chemical assessments under its Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) Program. EPA is also authorized under TSCA to obtain information on chemical risks and to control those it determines pose an unreasonable risk. Since EPA had not developed sufficient chemical assessment information under these programs to limit chemical exposures that may pose substantial health risks, we added this issue to our High Risk List in 2009.

Agency actions that resulted in a “Not Met” rating:

IRIS program: As we reported in our 2015 update, EPA did not meet the criteria for demonstrating progress in having implemented corrective measures and resolving the IRIS Program as a high-risk area. For example, EPA did not issue any IRIS assessments in fiscal year 2014 and issued one assessment in fiscal year 2015. In addition, EPA repeatedly delayed the issuance of a multiyear IRIS plan that EPA indicated will include some corrective measures for the program.

TSCA program: We also reported that EPA did not meet the demonstrated progress criteria as (1) it did not define how corrective measures would be implemented and (2) it was too soon to determine whether EPA's approach to managing chemicals within its existing TSCA authorities would position the agency to achieve its goal of ensuring chemical safety. As of April 2016, lawmakers were negotiating to resolve differences between separate bills to reform TSCA.

What remains to be done:

In 2015, we reported that EPA needed to address recurring issues concerning the clarity and transparency of its development and presentation of draft IRIS assessments as well as long-standing issues regarding the availability and accuracy of current information to IRIS users. These issues include EPA program offices and the status of IRIS assessments—including when an assessment will be started, which assessments are ongoing, and when an assessment is projected to be completed. In addition, EPA should have a strategy for identifying and filling data gaps that would enable it to conduct IRIS toxicity assessments for nominated chemicals that are not selected for assessment because sufficient data from health studies are not available. In 2015, EPA was still responding to the National Academies' suggestions by implementing changes to the way it developed draft IRIS assessments. As EPA demonstrates more progress toward its planned changes, we will continue to monitor EPA's approach including reviewing the IRIS multiyear plan, which had a delayed issuance of December 2015. EPA must demonstrate progress toward fully using existing TSCA authorities and continuing to work with Congress to facilitate any needed legislative changes that could provide the agency with sufficient authority to assess and control toxic chemicals. EPA has not provided information on its planned approach to pursuing data submitted to the European Chemicals Agency from U.S. companies, and whether it may include voluntary or regulatory means to pursue such data. We will continue to monitor TSCA reform legislation and EPA's progress toward fully using its TSCA authorities.

Progress needed on other criteria:

In addition to this area receiving a “not met” rating for the criteria of demonstrated progress, we reported in 2015 that it received a “not met” rating for capacity. It received a “met” rating for leadership commitment and “partially met” ratings for action plan and monitoring.

Enclosure VI: Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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Staff Acknowledgments

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