



Highlights of [GAO-09-983](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The September 11 terrorist attacks have heightened concerns about the security of the nation's icons and parks, which millions of people visit every year. The National Park Service (Park Service) within the Department of the Interior (Interior) is responsible for securing nearly 400 park units that include icons and other parks. In 2004, GAO identified a set of key protection practices that include: *allocating resources using risk management, leveraging technology, information sharing and coordination, performance measurement and testing, and strategic management of human capital*. As requested, GAO determined whether the Park Service's security efforts for national icons and parks reflected key practices. To meet this objective, GAO used its key practices as criteria, reviewed five icons and parks to gain firsthand knowledge, analyzed Interior documents, and interviewed Interior officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior. These include instructing the Park Service to develop a more comprehensive risk management approach, guidance and standards for leveraging technology, strategies to improve communications and to clearly define staff roles, and programs related to performance measurement, testing, and training. Interior concurred with the report's recommendations.

View [GAO-09-983](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact Mark L. Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or [goldsteinm@gao.gov](mailto:goldsteinm@gao.gov).

## HOMELAND SECURITY

### Actions Needed to Improve Security Practices at National Icons and Parks

#### What GAO Found

The Park Service has implemented a range of security improvements since the September 11 terrorist attacks and has worked to integrate security into its primary mission to preserve national icons and parks for the public's enjoyment. For example, it has established a senior-level security manager position and taken steps to strengthen security at the icons, and is developing a risk management program for small parks. These efforts exhibit some aspects of the key protection practices, but GAO found limitations in each of the areas.

The Park Service does not *allocate resources using risk management* servicewide or cost-effectively *leverage technology*. While the Park Service, with assistance from Interior, has conducted risk assessments and implemented countermeasures to enhance security at the icons, some critical vulnerabilities remain. Moreover, the Park Service has not advanced this risk management approach for icons to the rest of its national parks. Without a servicewide risk management approach, the Park Service lacks assurance that security efforts are focused where they are needed. Furthermore, while icons and parks may use a variety of security technologies and other countermeasures, they do not have guidance for evaluating the cost-effectiveness of these investments, thus limiting assurances of efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Additionally, the Park Service faces limitations with *sharing and coordinating information* internally and lacks a servicewide approach for routine *performance measurement and testing*. Although the Park Service collaborates with external organizations, it lacks comparable arrangements for internal security communications and, as a result, parks are not equipped to share information with one another on common security problems and solutions. Furthermore, the Park Service has not established security performance measures and lacks an analysis tool that could be used to evaluate program effectiveness and inform an overall risk management strategy. Thus, icons and parks have little information on the status and performance of security that they can use to manage daily activities or that Park Service management can use to manage security throughout the organization.

Finally, *strategic human capital management* is an area of concern because of the Park Service's lack of clearly defined security roles and a security training curriculum. For example, staff that are assigned security duties are generally not required to meet qualifications or undergo specialized training. Absent a security training curriculum, there is less assurance that staff are well-equipped to effectively identify and mitigate risks at national icons and parks.