



Highlights of [GAO-12-382T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight, Investigations, and Management, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (9/11 Commission Act) requires that beginning in fiscal year 2009 and every 4 years thereafter the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) conduct a review that provides a comprehensive examination of the homeland security strategy of the United States. In February 2010, DHS issued its first Quadrennial Homeland Security Review (QHSR) report, outlining a strategic framework for homeland security. In July 2010 DHS issued a report on the results of its Bottom-Up Review (BUR), a departmentwide assessment to implement the QHSR strategy by aligning DHS's programmatic activities, such as inspecting cargo at ports of entry, and its organizational structure with the missions and goals identified in the QHSR. This testimony addresses DHS's efforts to (1) strategically plan its homeland security missions through the QHSR, (2) set strategic priorities and measure performance, and (3) build a unified department. This testimony is based on GAO reports issued in December 2010, February 2011, and September 2011.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made recommendations in prior reports for DHS to, among other things, provide more time for consulting with stakeholders during the QHSR process, examine additional mechanisms for obtaining input from nonfederal stakeholders, and examine how risk information could be used in prioritizing future QHSR initiatives. DHS concurred and has actions planned or underway to address them.

View [GAO-12-382T](#). For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or maurerd@gao.gov.

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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Strategic Planning and Management Functions

What GAO Found

DHS's primary strategic planning effort in recent years has been the QHSR. In September 2011, GAO reported on the extent to which DHS consulted with stakeholders in developing the QHSR. DHS solicited input from various stakeholder groups in conducting the first QHSR, but DHS officials, several stakeholders GAO contacted, and other reviewers of the QHSR noted concerns with time frames provided for stakeholder consultations and outreach to nonfederal stakeholders. Specifically, DHS consulted with stakeholders—federal agencies; department and component officials; state, local, and tribal governments; the private sector; academics; and policy experts—through various mechanisms, such as the solicitation of papers to help frame the QHSR. DHS and these stakeholders identified benefits from these consultations, such as DHS receiving varied perspectives. However, stakeholders also identified challenges in the consultation process, such as concerns about the limited time frames for providing input into the QHSR or BUR and the need to examine additional mechanisms for including more nonfederal stakeholders in consultations. By providing more time for obtaining feedback and examining mechanisms to obtain nonfederal stakeholders' input, DHS could strengthen its management of stakeholder consultations and be better positioned to review and incorporate, as appropriate, stakeholders' input during future reviews.

DHS considered various factors in identifying high-priority BUR initiatives for implementation in fiscal year 2012 but did not include risk information as one of these factors, as called for in GAO's prior work and DHS's risk-management guidance. Through the BUR, DHS identified 43 initiatives aligned with the QHSR mission areas to serve as mechanisms for implementing those mission areas. According to DHS officials, DHS did not consider risk information in prioritizing initiatives because of differences among the initiatives that made it difficult to compare risks across them, among other things. In September 2011, GAO reported that consideration of risk information during future implementation efforts could help strengthen DHS's prioritization of mechanisms for implementing the QHSR. Further, GAO reported that DHS established performance measures for most of the QHSR objectives and had plans to develop additional measures. However, with regard to specific programs, GAO's work has shown that a number of programs and efforts lack outcome goals and measures, hindering the department's ability to effectively assess results.

In 2003, GAO designated the transformation of DHS as high risk because DHS had to transform 22 agencies—several with major management challenges—into one department, and failure to effectively address DHS's management and mission risks could have serious consequences for U.S. national and economic security. DHS has taken action to implement, transform, and strengthen its management functions, such as developing a strategy for addressing this high-risk area and putting in place common policies, procedures, and systems within individual management functions, such as human capital, that help to integrate its component agencies. However, DHS needs to demonstrate measurable, sustainable progress in implementing its strategy and corrective actions to address its management challenges.