

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-757](#), a report to Congressional Committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Of the approximately 1,230 facilities that FAA staff occupy, FAA is responsible for maintaining over 40 percent of them—spending over \$1 billion since 2008; most of the remaining facilities are leased and maintained by the lessors. Yet, according to FAA officials, air traffic control facilities—the bulk of FAA-maintained facilities—have a current maintenance backlog of about \$259 million. Deferring maintenance on facilities could compromise safe airspace operations.

The FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 mandated that GAO study the condition of FAA-staffed facilities. This report addresses, among other things, (1) the condition of FAA-staffed facilities and the reliability of assessment methods; (2) the extent to which FAA has responded to identified safety deficiencies; and (3) the extent to which FAA's actions to ensure that its facilities are in good condition follow leading practices. GAO analyzed data and documents from FAA, the Department of Labor, and GSA, and interviewed agency officials and others, including union representatives.

What GAO Recommends

To ensure more accurate and reliable data to help decision making on its facilities' conditions, GAO is recommending that FAA (1) improve the precision of the methods used to estimate the conditions of uninspected terminal facilities and (2) implement a plan to improve REMS, consistent with sound data collection practices. DOT provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-13-757](#). For more information, contact Gerald Dillingham, 202-512-2834, dillinghamg@gao.gov

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FAA FACILITIES

Improved Condition Assessment Methods Could Better Inform Maintenance Decisions and Capital-Planning Efforts

What GAO Found

According to data provided by FAA and the General Services Administration (GSA), federally maintained facilities FAA occupies are generally in fair to good condition. FAA assesses the condition of staffed facilities in several ways, including direct inspections. However, the condition of approximately 75 percent of Air Traffic Organization's (ATO) terminal facilities is based on estimates derived from the approximately 25 percent of facilities that have been inspected over the last 6 years. Our analysis of FAA's statistical model for estimating the condition of uninspected terminal facilities found it to be imprecise; it uses one variable—age of the facility—to estimate the facility's condition. Adding other variables that are correlated with condition, such as facility replacement value and use, could potentially improve the estimate's accuracy. In addition, facility condition data in FAA's Real Estate Management System (REMS)—FAA's database for tracking its inventory of real property assets, including the size, replacement value, and condition of each asset—are not derived from sound data collection practices and did not match facility condition data from ATO or other FAA organizational components responsible for maintaining these facilities. Inaccuracies in REMS data undermine its usefulness as a management tool.

Entities Responsible for Maintaining FAA's Staffed Facilities, 2013

Facility description	FAA	GSA	Other (incl. non-federal)	Total
Operations (terminal & en-route facilities)	425	--	137	562
Administrative, technical, training	80	8	583	671
Total	505	8	720	1233

Source: GAO analysis of FAA and GSA data.

FAA has mechanisms to identify and mitigate safety deficiencies at FAA facilities. For example, FAA annually conducts a safety and health inspection, as required by regulation, at each of its staffed facilities under its Environmental and Occupational Safety and Health program. Identified deficiencies are tracked to ensure they are mitigated. FAA also established safety committees to maintain an open channel of communication between employees and managers concerning safety matters in the workplace. FAA employees may also report any hazards they identify to FAA managers at their facility or, as applicable, to their union representative or the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

FAA has taken actions to strengthen its capital planning process to help ensure its facilities are in good condition. In 2012, FAA created a Facilities Group Manager position within ATO to coordinate management of all its operations facilities, both staffed and unstaffed. ATO's Facilities Group Manager is taking steps to develop a standard prioritization process focusing on safety, mission critical needs, and environmental requirements to modernize and sustain existing equipment, facilities, and services; this approach is to be used to develop FAA's future budget requests. FAA is developing a 10-year "Get Well" plan that, among other things, is to establish an approach to reduce the maintenance backlog for existing facilities. This plan, along with a facilities consolidation report the agency is developing in response to the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012, should help provide justification and cost projections for maintaining facilities in good condition.