

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-757T](#) a testimony before the Subcommittee on Government Operations, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal real property portfolio, comprising approximately 900,000 buildings and structures and worth billions of dollars, presents several key management challenges. GAO has designated federal real property management as a high risk issue since 2003 due to long-standing challenges including unreliable data on this property, excess and underutilized property, over-reliance on leasing, and challenges with security. Since then, the federal government has given high-level attention to reforming real property management and has made some progress. It established the FRPC, chaired by OMB, in 2004. The FRPC created the FRPP, which is intended to be a comprehensive database developed for describing the nature, use, and extent of all real property under the custody and control of executive branch agencies. The FRPP is managed by GSA and began collecting data in 2005. GAO's recent work has found, however, that data problems related to federal real property have continued.

This statement discusses data guidance and reliability issues GAO has found regarding federal civilian agencies' data on: (1) excess and underutilized property, (2) structures, (3) maintenance backlogs, and (4) cost saving estimates. It is based on previous GAO reports on federal real property issued from June 2012 through January 2014 and some updates on the status of recommendations made in those reports. To obtain these updates, GAO monitored agency actions taken and performed follow-up with agency officials.

View [GAO-14-757T](#). For more information, contact David Wise at (202) 512-2834 or wised@gao.gov

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FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

Better Guidance and More Reliable Data Needed to Improve Management

What GAO Found

GAO found in 2012 that government-wide real property data were not sufficiently reliable to support sound management and decision making about excess and underutilized property. The Federal Real Property Council (FRPC) had not ensured that key data elements of the Federal Real Property Profile (FRPP) were defined and reported consistently and accurately. For example, FRPP data did not accurately describe the properties at 23 of the 26 locations GAO visited, often overstating the condition and annual operating costs of buildings. GAO recommended that the General Services Administration (GSA), in consultation with FRPC, develop a plan to improve the FRPP. Consequently, GSA developed an action plan and was scheduled to complete these changes by June 2013. GAO is determining whether these actions improve FRPP consistency and reliability and plans to report the results as part of GAO's 2015 high risk update.

In 2014, GAO found that incorrect and inconsistent data on federal structures such as roads, bridges, railroads, and utility systems, limited the value of the government-wide FRPP data. For example, agencies GAO reviewed defined structures differently leading to inconsistencies. GAO recommended that GSA, in coordination with FRPC, clarify the definition of structures and assess the feasibility of limiting the data on structures submitted to the FRPP. GSA provided an action plan in December 2013 to implement GAO's recommendations, but no timeframe was provided for when the proposed actions would be completed.

In a 2014 report, GAO found that civilian agencies followed most leading practices in managing their facility maintenance and repair backlogs, except for transparent reporting about the funding amounts agencies are spending to maintain their assets and manage their backlogs. Different agency financial reporting requirements as well as FRPP reporting guidance did not require a specific process for determining deferred maintenance and repair backlogs, and agencies could use their existing processes. Thus, GAO recommended that OMB, in collaboration with agencies, collect and report information on agencies' costs for annual maintenance and repair performed and funding spent to manage their existing backlogs. OMB and FRPC agencies have taken actions to improve management of deferred maintenance, including working to refine FRPP data, but have not yet fully implemented GAO's recommendation.

In a 2013 review of selected agencies' reporting of real property cost savings data, GAO identified several challenges that reduced the reliability and transparency of the data the government reported. For example, OMB did not require agencies to provide detailed documentation of their reported savings or include specific information about agencies' reported savings on Performance.gov, limiting transparency. Furthermore, guidance issued by OMB was not clear on the types of savings that could be reported, particularly because the term "cost savings" was not clearly defined. GAO recommended that OMB establish clear and specific standards to help ensure reliability and transparency in the reporting of future real-property cost savings. OMB generally agreed with the recommendation. GAO is determining the extent to which OMB has implemented it and GAO plans to report the results as part of GAO's 2015 high risk update.